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# MIKE SHAYNE

## MYSTERY MAGAZINE



## THE CASE OF THE RELUCTANT MILLIONAIRE

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Short Novel  
By Brett Halliday

## VINCENT TERESA: BUM ON THE RUN

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# MIKE SHAYNE



## MYSTERY MAGAZINE

DECEMBER, 1975  
VOL. 37, NO. 6

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

### THE CASE OF THE RELUCTANT MILLIONAIRE

By BRETT HALLIDAY

*Robert Galbraith found the anonymity he sought in Miami's Skid Row. Nobody bothered him, nobody cared, and that was the way he wanted it—until his mother died and left him a millionaire. All at once, everybody wanted Galbraith, most of them for his money or his life. When Shayne was hired to find him by an insurance company, he, too, became the target of a faceless army of evil characters who had no wish to have the recluse found until they had picked his bones.*

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LEO MARGULIES  
Publisher

CYLVIA KLEINMAN  
Managing Editor

LAURIE ROSE  
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**COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE**

**The New MIKE SHAYNE Short Novel**



# The Case of The RELUCTANT MILLIONAIRE

by BRETT HALLIDAY

*Finding a Skid Row recluse is a difficult problem at best. But when Shayne is sent after Galbraith, the assignment is further complicated by an angry hornets' nest of unknown killers out to get the recluse and his money.*



THE HALLWAY of the downtown Miami flophouse was dark. There was supposed to be a fifteen-watt bulb in the single light fixture by the stairwell, but it had burned out and never been replaced. The window opened on a narrow alley and was so dark with grime and grease that little of the late afternoon light filtered through.

The walls of the narrow hall

were streaked with grease and paint was peeling from the doors of the narrow, cell-like rooms. The bare floor was filthy too.

Mike Shayne, ace Miami private detective, put one foot down on a particularly slippery patch of filth. It made him slip and lurch to get his balance.

It also saved his life.

The thrown knife missed his

© 1975, by Brett Halliday

neck—it could have severed spinal chord or artery)—by less than two inches. It flew on down the hall and thudded—point first—into the window frame. The wood was too rotten to hold it. It fell out and clangled on the floor.

By the time Shayne had whipped around, there was nothing at all to be seen. The blade might have come from any of the row of rooms, but all the doors were closed. It could have come from the twin stairwell at the opposite end of the hall. There was no way to tell.

It might have been thrown by someone who had recognized Shayne and held a deadly grudge stemming from a long-past case. It might have come from a derelict—or a mugger who would kill for a few dollars or a pair of good shoes. It might have been thrown by someone who knew what Shayne was doing in that fetid refuge for winos and lost souls—perhaps even by the one man Shayne was looking for.

There was simply no way to tell.

Shayne picked up the blade. It was a cheap hunting-style knife worn down and sharpened to a razor edge.

He put the blade flat under his shoe and pulled up on the handle till the cheap metal broke. He left the pieces on the

dirty floor. They would not be sued to kill anyone again.

He went on down the stairs and through the filthy "lobby." After the smell of the building, the air of the downtown street was a relief. He took a deep breath to fill his lungs.

"You've got to find our man," the insurance company vice-president had said to Shayne. "We've tried all the usual ways—and they've turned out to be blind alleys. I told our people in New York that if anyone could turn over the stone he's hiding under it would be Mike Shayne."

"That's all very flattering, Mr. Peters," the big redhead said, "but first I need to know who you want—why you want him—and most of all why you haven't been able to find him by yourself."

"That's fair enough," the insurance man said. "His name is Bob Galbraith—Robert Wilton Galbraith to be exact. At least that's the name he was born to and was still using when he dropped out of sight forty years ago. We haven't the slightest idea what he calls himself now."

"Do you even know if he's alive?" Shayne asked.

"That's a good question, Mr. Shayne," Peters replied. "All I can say is that we have reason

to believe he's alive—and living here in Miami. We don't know what he's doing or what name he uses. We think that, if he is here, he'll be living on or around Skid Row. He won't be working—at least not steadily—and won't need a driver's license or a Social Security number or any of the usual easy-trace identifications. At least we checked out all these things and came up with a zero."

"What makes you think he's here?"

"His mother said on her death bed that she saw Bob in Miami two years ago and that he was living here. She was here on a vacation and spotted him on the street. They had a short talk and then he vanished again without telling her anything about his life or giving her any address."

"That sounds strange."

"It's even stranger," Peters said, "if you know that she told him she was leaving him a million dollars in her will."

"Strange?" Shayne said, "I'd say that made Mr. Galbraith a first-class weirdo with oak leaf cluster. What was the idea?"

"Apparently he likes the way he lives and doesn't think he needs money," Peters said. "After all, how much can you spend on Skid Row?"

"I see."

"Anyway, my company doesn't care whether he wants the money or not. It's a paid-up life policy on our firm and we have to see that it gets to the named beneficiary. That means we find him and give him the money. After that, he can throw it out the window or endow a home for pygmy rattlesnakes if he wants. After he gets the money, we don't care."

"If you *don't* locate him . . . ?"

"In that case, he has two younger brothers who will get the money in due course after we have him declared legally dead. That's what they want us to do now. The mother lived to be eighty-nine and was sick most of her last ten years. Medical bills chewed up the rest of the estate. As it is, the brothers will only split about forty thousand dollars between them by the time the estate clears probate."

"I can see why they wouldn't want the long-lost elder brother found," Shayne said. "Do you think they could have done away with him?"

"We don't know about that," Peters told him. "That's what we hire people like you to find out for us. I must admit, though, that the brothers haven't been what you could call cooperative in giving us leads. They admit to knowing what we do—that their mother said

she talked to Bob in Miami—and not one bit more."

"Anything else I should know?" Shayne asked. "So far, it's not much."

"Just three facts," Peters said. "Everybody tells us he'll be skinny. He was thin as a boy and young man and his mother said he was still thin when she saw him two years ago."

"Wonderful description," Shayne said. "What can I do with that?"

"You can do better with *this*," Peters said. "Bob Galbraith has a tattoo on the upper part of his left arm—inside the muscle towards the body. It's two crossed pool cues and, inside the angle they make, an eight ball. That should be easy to spot."

"Only if I can catch him in the shower and get him to raise his arm," Shayne said. He added: "They don't take that many showers on Skid Row."

"We have a snapshot of him in high school," Peters said. "Also he loves to shoot pool. That's what the tattoo is all about. Look for him around a pool hall."

"Is he good at the game? A shark or a hustler?" The redhead asked.

"From all I could get from his brothers," Peters said, "as a boy he was one of the world's worst players."

"But he likes pool?"

"Enough so that's where you'll probably find him—hanging around a pool hall. At least we figure so. If there was a big game in town—Minnesota Fats say—he would show up for sure."

"Why not bring Fats down?" Shayne said with a grin.

"It's easier and cheaper to hire you," Peters said. "We've advertised in the local papers, of course. You know, the usual thing—news to your great advantage." No answer."

"Did you use his right name in the ads?"

"Of course. We figured he'd recognize it no matter what he calls himself here. Can you handle it, Shayne? We'll pay your usual fees plus a ten thousand dollar bonus if you can turn him up before the will goes to probate."

"If he's alive and in Miami, I'll find him," Shayne said.

"Make that if he's alive," Peters said. "We'll cover any expenses if you're on his trail, anywhere in the world."

"You must want that man," Shayne said.

"A million dollars worth of want." The insurance man nodded. "Here's a folder with copies of everything we have on him all the way back to his grammar school days."

"I'm on my way," Shayne said.

## II

SHAYNE'S FIRST STOP after leaving the insurance company office was his own second floor location on East Flagler Street in the hub of downtown Miami. He wanted to check with his beautiful secretary and assistant, Lucy Hamilton.

"I'm going underground, Angel," he told her. "If anybody calls, I've gone out of town on a case. I don't want it known I'm working Skid Row. Too many people are likely to recognize me, anyway."

"Will cover, Michael," she said. Lucy Hamilton was the only person since his Mother to call the big redhead by his full first name.

Shayne made a couple of phone calls to the police, where he was well known as a close personal friend of the burly chief, Will Gentry. For that reason he was sure of cooperation from the various departments.

The police reported that no one called Robert or Bob Galbraith was at present in duranceville either in the County stockade, or the city or county jails. Galbraith had no criminal record with the police—at least not under his own name. He could have been arrested once or many times under an alias, of course.



Other calls confirmed that no one of the name was or had been in City Hospital. That left the whole of downtown Miami to search.

It wasn't a large area—roughly fourteen blocks by eight between the Miami River and Biscayne Bay. Not a large area but a jungle full of partly or wholly degenerated neighborhoods. Condemned roominghouses and others that should have been condemned—ancient hotels and abandoned warehouses abounded. So did alleys, cut-offs, and cul-de-sacs under the newly built expressway system. Numerous old and rotting boats were tied up along the river-banks.

There were also, cheek by

jewels, new hotels and department stores, the city auditorium complex, and various state, local and federal buildings, including the old courthouse tower. The daytime population included government and other workers, tourists and shoppers.

At night the population changed. There were old people who lived in the decayed hotels and rooming houses. The rents were relatively cheap. But after dark, when the yellow sodium vapor arc lamps came on to shed a harsh mockery of sunlight in the streets, the oldsters locked themselves into their rooms in fright.

Then the pimps and prostitutes, the muggers and the dope pushers came out. The few stores which remained open were manned by wary merchants and clerks. The bars did a roaring business but no one else did. Even the winos and Skid Row denizens went into their quarters or hid themselves "in the weeds."

These people were nameless and faceless, and that was the way they wanted to be. Some had forgotten their real names. Some were trying hard to forget. It was here that Shayne had to go to search out one needle in a haystack.

He had no illusion that it would be easy.

He went about the task in a highly professional way, with a knowledge born of long years of living and working in this very area. Galbraith or anyone else living in the central city complex had to sleep somewhere. He also had to eat. There were a limited number of places where he could do either.

He would also need money from time to time, and he would look for work of certain kinds at the available sources. Since he was a pool shark, he would hang around one of the downtown pool halls or billiard parlors.

Shayne set out to make a methodical survey of all these places. He prepared himself for nights and days in the half-world of the skid row dweller and casual drifter. He knew it would be impossible to disguise himself completely in a town where he was as well known as Miami. So he didn't even try.

Instead, he did something a lot smarter. He set out to create an image of Mike Shayne down on his luck—Mike Shayne getting over a colossal hang-over—Mike Shayne temporarily broke and hiding from his creditors.

It was a role he could play to the satisfaction of the people among whom he would be living.

A fast run to the Northwest

Twenty-seventh Avenue Thrift Shop got him a badly worn dark suit two sizes too large for even his big frame. It gave Shayne the casually seedy look of the man-about-the-wrong-end-of-town that he wanted. The price was four dollars and a half.

Another quarter bought him a battered straw hat to replace the snap-brim fedora that had been his trademark as long as anyone could remember. A pair of dark sunglasses and a resolve to wash as little as possible and to shave not at all during this particular case comprised the rest of his disguise.

His preparations also included a loaded forty-five Colt automatic in a belt holster back of his right hip, concealed by the loose-fitting jacket of the suit.

He signed in at the aged and fetid Majestic Hotel—still known to most of the shadow people as "Ma" Getty's in fond remembrance of a former owner. The room cost him five dollars and a half each night—up from the seventy-five cents Ma had charged for her malodorous little cubicles. Inflation had struck even the dives of Skid Row.

If the desk clerk recognized his new guest, he wisely decided to say nothing about it. Shayne locked his door and

stretched out on the narrow iron cot to wait for darkness to fall.

When he finally did leave the little room, he didn't even get to the stairway before someone threw the knife at the back of his neck. In a cleaner hostelry, he would have been dead or crippled then and there.

So he broke the knife under his foot and went on. A search of the rooms would have been futile.

By the time Shayne hit the street, dusk had turned to darkness over the bay, but the city itself was as bright as day under the harsh, yellow, sodium vapor arc lights which had been installed in a municipal effort to reduce—or at least discourage—violent crime.

Even the softer shadows that existed during the day were wiped out by the strong light.

His first stop was the Miami Rescue Mission on N.W. First Street down toward the river. A transient could sleep there for a dollar and a quarter on one of the downstairs benches. The beds on the second floor cost two and a quarter—unless the man was truly indigent and sick, in which case the charge might be waived.

At this early hour, the men were eating soup and bread before going to sleep.

Shayne looked them over

carefully but saw no one fitting the description.

They looked him over, too, but without showing sign of recognition. Some of them knew him, of course. By morning the word that he was prowling Skid Row would be out. It wouldn't be out till morning, though. None of these men would be on the streets again that night.

Shayne knew the Mission director of course and had a short talk in his private office. The man couldn't help him. He offered a vague recollection of having seen the "crossed sticks and eight ball" tattoo on someone taking a shower at the Mission, but that had been months back. He couldn't remember if the man had been tall or short, fat or thin, or even black or white.

"Mostly they keep their shirts on except in the shower, Mike," he said. "I'll keep an eye out though. What has this guy done?"

"He hasn't really *done* anything," Shayne said. "I'm not on that sort of case. I only want to ask him some questions."

He didn't add, "like why he doesn't want a million dollars?"

### III

BACK ON THE STREET, Mike Shayne headed down First towards the Miami River. He

wanted to question some of the "River Rats" who lived in houseboats and other ancient and miscellaneous craft moored to the banks.

He hadn't gone two blocks before two men came out of an alley and began to follow him. One was black, the other white. They were both big and moved with the easy ferocity of a pair of big hunting cougers from the deep Everglades.

It took Mike Shayne only a moment to realize that he was their target. A lesser man might have made a run for it while he still had a good head start on the two. A *good* man would have put his back against a building and waited for their impending attack to develop.

Shayne did neither. Characteristically, *he* went on the attack. He turned around and headed straight for the two men. He didn't run at them or shout or pull his gun or give any other hint of his intentions.

He didn't even appear to notice that they were there at all.

He simply turned around on the sidewalk and headed for them at a pace so smooth and easy they didn't realise how fast he was coming until he was right on top of them. Then they tried to stop and almost fell over their own feet.

These were hunters and it hadn't occurred to either of them that the big man was hunting *them*. Not until it was too late.

Shayne was almost on them before the easy sneers on their faces turned to sudden alarm. They spread apart to flank him from both right and left, but the big detective was so close that the action worked to his advantage, not to theirs.

The big redhead just bored on in. The man to his left put his back to a telephone pole and snatched for the switchblade knife in his hip pocket. He never got it out.

Mike Shayne swung his left hand and forearm in a backhand swipe that smashed the rear of the mugger's head against the telephone pole. It sounded like pounding a steak with a mallet to tenderize it. The man was out cold before his knees crumbled. He slid to a sitting position with his back still against the pole.

For a long moment he remained upright, then toppled over on the dirty cement sidewalk, landing on his face.

The other mugger had sense enough to try to get room in which to fight. For a moment he back-pedaled, his feet moving as fast as a dancer's. He did manage to get his knife out and open, with its five-inch stiletto

blade flickering in his right hand.

Then one of his feet slipped on some filth on the sidewalk and threw him off balance. Before he could recover, Shayne was on him.

The big detective's left hand caught the mugger's knife arm above the wrist. He twisted his iron grip till the man's wrist almost snapped and the knife dropped. Its blade gave a metallic twang and broke when the point struck the concrete.

Shayne maintained his grip on the twisted wrist. His right hand closed, almost gently around the mugger's dirty neck.

"All I have to do is tighten up and twist your head off," the big redhead told the man. His voice had a ring of total conviction.

"Let me go," the man cried, a squeal of fear in his voice. "We wasn't going to do nothing to you. Honest to God, we wasn't!"

"You were tailing me," Shayne said implacably. "I suppose the knives were to pick your teeth with."

"Man," the other wined, "everybody down here carries knives. We didn't touch no knives till we saw you come at us. You know that."

"I know what you were doing," Mike Shayne said. "Now you tell me who put you on me. Talk, or I'll wring your neck

like you were a chicken. I want to know who put you and your partner onto me."

The man was silent. Shayne looked into his contorted face.

"I know you, Easy John," he said, "and you know me—so suppose you tell me what this is all about and hurry it. If you don't, I'll break your arm for a starter."

The man he held was genuinely frightened.

"I know you, Mr. Shayne," he blurted. "That's for sure. But we didn't know it was you when we come out of that alley. Dressed like you are—from behind, you was just another bum. You don't think I'd be fool enough to try and rip off a guy like you!"

"From where I stand, that's exactly what you *did* do," Shayne said. "So suppose you give me a reason why I don't break your arm. I don't like people who point knives at me."

"Let go!" Easy John gasped. "Then maybe I can give you a reason."

Shayne eased his grip a little.

The other choked before he said, "There ain't no contract out on you, Mr. Shayne. At least I ain't heard of none, man. There *is* a word out, though—I mean word you're lookin' for a man with a tattoo. You know—like a eight-ball tattoo on his chest. The contract is on

him—a thousand bucks contract on the tattooed man."

"Who put it on?" Shayne demanded. "Who wants the man dead?"

"I dunno, man," Easy John said. "I swear I dunno. All I heard is, anybody with that tattoo better crawl in a hole and stay there if he wants to see tomorrow."

The voice had the ring of sincerity. Mike Shayne let go his throat.

"Pick up your buddy here and get off the street," he said. "Next time, know who it is you want to mug."

When the two hoodlums were gone, Shayne stood there on Northwest First Street tugging the lobe of his left ear with the thumb and forefinger of his big right hand. He was thinking hard.

This was a development that demanded full and careful consideration on the big detective's part. First of all—who wanted Bob Galbraith dead? It could be the two brothers Peters, the Insurance Vice President, had mentioned. They had a million dollars worth of motive.

On the other hand—would they know whom to contact in Miami if they wanted their brother dead? Would they be able to cover their tracks in view of the fact that they were the number one suspects?

Shayne was in doubt on the answers to both of those questions. On the other hand—who else could it be?

In any case, the news he had just heard could only make his own job of locating Galbraith the harder. Galbraith would surely hear there was a price on his head and it would drive him even deeper into hiding than before. He might even be driven to leave Miami and seek security in the Skid Row of some other city—perhaps New Orleans, Dallas, even Los Angeles.

On the other hand, Galbraith was an educated man from a middle-class background. He might figure out that the best way to hide from the Skid Row killers was to surface again in something resembling his old level of society.

It would be the best way to hide from Shayne, too, of course. But the big detective wasn't going to cross that bridge till he came to it.

Galbraith's first problem would be to hide himself for this one night. If he had a regular pad, he'd stay away from that. Where, then, would he, where could he go?

Shayne remembered an old saying from along Miami's Skid Row.

"If you want to hide from the muggers," it went, "sleep in the

weeds. Not just any weeds. Walk enough blocks out so you're clear of the regular downtown area. Find a patch of weeds far enough out so the regulars don't know it and the cops don't shake it down."

Shayne thought hard. If he was on the run and ready to sleep in the weeds—where would he go? He figured he knew the town as well or better than anyone on Sid Row and should be able to outthink the man he was seeking.

After a moment, he set out with long space-eating strides, headed for the river bank and the area of Northwest Fifth Street. In ten minutes he reached the area he was looking for. It was where the river and the canal met in a section of old rotting boats and decrepit buildings.

He wasn't the first to get there, though. Over by the river bank a couple of police black-and-white patrol cars were parked with their flashers going. Even as he looked, an ambulance pulled up.

Shayne sidled over. The sergeant in charge was an old friend who recognized Shayne at once and gave his get-up a quizzical look but omitted any comment.

"What's up, sergeant?" Shayne asked.

"Hello, Shayne," Sergeant

Clark answered. "Some more of the same. Somebody mugged and stabbed a bum down by the river."

Ambulance attendants were bringing the body up as he spoke.

"Mind if I take a look?"

"Suit yourself. It would save trouble if you knew him."

Shayne walked over and uncovered the head and upper part of the body. The thin face was masked with stubble and still twisted with pain from his violent death. The teeth were broken and yellowed. He wore a torn T-shirt that had once advertised the virtues of Mickey Mouse.

He had crossed billiard cues and an eight-ball tattooed on the upper part of his right arm near the shoulder. Under that—near the elbow—another tattoo read, *Born to Lose*.

"Ain't it the truth? Mike Shayne thought.

"Well," the police sergeant asked, "is it anybody you know?"

"No," Shayne said, "nobody I know. I never saw this one before."

#### IV

SHAYNE WALKED back into town more slowly than he had come out to where the body was found. It was still early in the

evening and the people he wanted to talk to wouldn't be out and moving yet. He had plenty of time to think—and a lot of thinking to do.

This wasn't a simple missing persons case—not even a man-on-the-run case any more. It had unexpected and very deadly overtones. The murdered man Mike Shayne had seen on the abulance stretcher wasn't Bob Galbraith. The tattoo was on the wrong arm and on the wrong part of the arm. It was bright and had been applied very recently. Galbraith had worn his since High School days.

Had the stranger been killed because somebody thought he was Galbraith—or because someone wanted Shayne and the police to think he was Galbraith? Where had he gotten the tattoo and why had it been put on the wrong arm? Was there any connection between this death and the two earlier attacks on Shayne?

Above all—where was Bob Galbraith?

*Too bad there isn't a big pool game in town*, Shayne thought. In spite of the fact that he knew of no such attraction, it was a pool hall that he was heading for.

Its name was Harry's Supreme and it was on West Flagler Street close to where

the expressway passed over. The front was open to the street and five of the six tables were in use. A score of hangers-on watched from chairs along the wall. There was a beer and wine bar, tended by a couple of barmaids, covering most of the rear wall. A door at one end of the bar led into a back room, where poker and dice games were sometimes held.

In the old days, there had been Saturday night cock fights in the rear, but that action had long since been moved out into the unincorporated county area. The original Harry was gone long, but the present owner insisted on being called "Harry," even though his real name was Sam.

Shayne found him standing at the far end of the room, near the bar. He said, "Evening, Harry."

Harry said, "Hello, Shayne. What in hell are you made up like that for."

"It doesn't seem to fool anybody but muggers tonight. I need some information, Harry."

"I probably don't have it."

Mike Shayne put his right hand flat on the bar. When he lifted it, there was a fifty dollar bill stuck to the wet wood.

Harry wiped the bill off and stuck it in his pants pocket.

"In that case," he said.

"I want a pool buff," Shayne



said. "He has to be a real buff. He has a set of sticks and an eight-ball tattooed on his arm."

"Are you kidding me?"

"You know him?"

"It ain't hardly worth the fifty," Harry said, but he made no effort to return the bill. "The guy's in the chair on the wall back of table four. Help yourself. Be my guest."

The man in the chair had on a dirty sports shirt. The arms of the shirt had been cut off at the shoulders.

"One question," Shayne said.

"Have you known this guy for long?"

"He comes and goes." Harry sounded indifferent.

"What's his name?"

"Don't even know if he has a name," Harry said. "Why don't you ask him?"

Shayne walked over beside the man in the chair. He could see the man watching his approach while trying not to show it.

Shayne put his back against the wall next to the man's chair. This one had a tattoo on his left arm. It was on the upper biceps and it looked new. Shayne guessed that it had been applied by the same artist as the tattoo on the arm of the corpse the police had.

The detective watched the pool game on table four. The man in the chair fidgeted. When he could stand it no longer, he took out a limp cigarette and asked Shayne for a match. Shayne lit one for him. The man stood up to accept the light—standing so his left biceps was practically right under the redhead's nose.

Shayne lit the cigarette and the man sat down. He looked as if he wanted to say something but couldn't quite decide what to say. He kept glancing from the table to Shayne and back.

Shayne let this go on for a while. He kept a perfectly

blank poker face. Finally he decided to break the tension. The next time the man looked up at him he appeared to notice the tattoo for the first time.

"I want a word with you, Mac," the detective said.

The man appeared almost eager. "What do you want?"

"Come out in the alley," Shayne said. "I want to talk privately."

"Sure," the man said. "Sure—anything you say, Mac."

They went out the front of Harry's Supreme and stepped into the alley that separated it from the dry-cleaning establishment next door.

"What you want to see me about?"

"I'm looking for a man with a tattoo like yours," big Shayne said quietly.

"Okay, so you found me."

"I didn't say I was looking for you," Shayne told him. "I said a man with a tattoo *like* yours."

"I'm your man. Take me in. I won't try to run away."

Shayne laughed at him. "I'm sure you won't, buster, but you aren't the man I'm looking for. Your tattoo is in the wrong place. You aren't the right size."

"Sure I am. Try me."

"Shut up," Shayne said. He took two more fifty dollar bills out of his pocket. The other man recognized them even in

the dim light of the alley. He stretched out his hand.

Shayne put the money back in his pocket. He said, "Not so fast. First, I want the answers to a couple of questions."

"Okay."

"Who put that tattoo on your arm and when?"

"I had it since I was a kid."

Shayne grabbed the man's left biceps. He winced, and did his best to pull clear.

"Your arm is still sore," Shayne said. "That mark hasn't been on it a week. Now do you tell the truth—or do I pull that arm off and take it with me for a sample?"

"Okay, okay—I got it three days ago. "Doc" Samuels over on North Miami Avenue did the job. You know where his place is?"

"I know. Did you tell him where to put it?"

"No. He picked the place himself. I told him what picture to put on."

"Now for the hundred dollar question," Shayne said. "Why did you ask for that particular picture."

The man appeared to hesitate, but the lure of the two fifties was too much for him. He thought, licked his lips, then burst out, "Hell! I suppose you know anyway. The word was out you was looking for a man with that mark. The word was

there's a lot of money for a man with that mark on his upper left arm."

"Not for *just* a man—for the *right* man."

"Oh?"

"The man I'm looking for has been wearing that mark on one of his arms most of his life," Shayne said. "Do you know a man like that?"

"Is there bread in it for me if I do?"

"There could be if you find me the right man. Can you do that?"

"Maybe I can," the man said, "and then again, maybe I can't. How much is in it for me—and how much for him?"

"For you, it all depends," Shayne said. "For him, it's another matter. I don't know what you heard—but I didn't say there was even a sawbuck in it for him."

"But," the man said, "the grapevine has it there's a bundle for him. Why do you think I put out good bread to get this picture on my arm?"

"Because you're a greedy shark," Mike Shayne told him. "I don't care what the grapevine told you. I only say I want to talk to him—that's all! I'm not saying anything about money for him. Just a talk."

"You're the man who wants him. You should know," the man said.

"One more thing," Shayne added.

"Yeah?"

"If I was you, I'd get Doc Samuels to paint over that thing on your arm—that, or I'd wear a long-sleeved shirt from now on."

"What you talking about, man?"

"There was another bum who got greedy like you," Mike Shayne said soberly. "He had the mark put on his arm, too. I think somebody didn't like it. The cops found him in the weeds an hour ago. He'd been stabbed to death. I don't exactly say the mark was the reason. But it sure could have been."

The man said, "Oh, my God!" He twisted free of the big detective's grip and took off down the alley.

## V

SHAYNE GRINNED to see the speed of the bum's getaway. But his grin didn't last long. Somebody had made sure there'd be a lot of eight-ball tattoos in the half-world of Miami's Skid Row—had put out the story of a fortune for the tattoo.

There'd be fake Galbraiths all over the place to complicate Shayne's job—and to get themselves killed. The big man couldn't figure it out. Why set

up the imposters and then kill them off?

Or were two forces operating? One to get men to tattoo themselves, the other to kill them off? Who would want to kill the men?

If someone was after Galbraith, why would he want to kill the others? Surely, he'd know the right tattoo when he saw it. The case was getting a lot more complicated than Shayne liked.

He stood for a moment wrapped in thought and then went back into the pool hall. The proprietor was still in the same place at the end of the bar. Shayne walked over to him and gave him the eye.

"That was the wrong man," he said.

Harry just shrugged. "Better luck next time, Shayne. You didn't say *why* you were looking for him."

"Right—I didn't say."

"It might help if I knew."

"Then again, it might not," Shayne said.

Out of the corner of his eye he could see one of the two barmaids staring intently at him. He walked up the bar to where she was standing and ordered a beer.

When she shoved it across the bar at him she said out of the corner of her mouth. "Go out and wait for me in the al-

ley. I think I can help. In about ten minutes. It's important."

Shayne finished the beer without comment. The woman who had spoken to him was a lush brunette with full breasts and wide hips. She was wearing a red skirt and a white see-through blouse.

She wore too much lipstick and a lot too much mascara, but under it her face was friendly and warm. She moved about her job with the speed and competence of long experience. There was a name tag pinned near her left shoulder that read *Gloria* in letters big enough for a customer to read six feet away.

When Shayne finished his beer, he put the empty glass down on the bar and went out the front past the busy pool tables, into the alley where he had talked to the bum only minutes before.

Gloria didn't keep him waiting long. She came out the rear door of the pool hall and hurried over to where he waited for her.

"I told Sam I have a headache," she said. "I got the night off. I got to have a talk with you."

"What about?" Mike Shayne asked. "Do you know the man I'm trying to find?"

"If it's Bob Galbraith you want—and I think it is—I know

him. First, I've got to know why you're looking for him."

Mike Shayne looked the woman over carefully. Usually, he wouldn't trust a Skid Row barhop around the corner with a fistful of dimes. But now instinct told him this girl could be relied upon. He decided to level with her.

"It's Galbraith I want," he said. "An insurance company hired me. His mother died recently and left him some money. That's the truth. He isn't in trouble with the law or anything like that."

"Might be better if he was," she said under her breath. Then to Shayne, "I know this ain't none of my business, but it's important. Is it just a little money coming to him or a lot of money?"

"It's a lot of money," Shayne said.

"I was afraid of that."

"Why?" The big detective was puzzled. "Most people I know would be delighted."

"You still haven't said how much it is?"

"I'm not about to," he said. "At least not until you tell me what you know about Galbraith."

She was standing close to him in the dimly lit alley between two buildings—so close that one of her breasts pressed against his shoulder. Yet there

was nothing seductive about her. She spoke in low tones to be sure that no one but he could hear her. That was all.

Shayne also sensed that she was thinking hard and trying to reach a decision.

He said, "You can trust me, Gloria. I told you the truth. I don't mean either you or Bob Galbraith any harm. It's like I said—an insurance company wants to give him a lot of money. I don't suppose he has to take it if he doesn't want to—but in that case he will have to sign some legal papers. So what do you know about him? Tell me where to find him."

She appeared to be thinking deeply. Then she said, "I'll do better than that. I'll take you to him."

It was the last thing Shayne expected to hear. He took her arm, said, "Let's go."

"I'll show you," she said, keeping pace with his long strides easily. She had to be in her mid-forties, but she seemed as strong and agile as a girl twenty years younger.

She said, "Do just what I tell you. If Bob spots a stranger coming, you'll never in the world find him. I don't think even I could do that if he really tried to hide out from me."

"Where are we going?"

"To a place where he sleeps

when he doesn't want to be found. It's off Fifth Street, near the river. There's a burned-out store nobody has used since the fire. Back of it is a yard full of junk. You wouldn't believe the junk, Mr. Shayne! In the middle of the mess is what used to be a storage shed.

"Bob has a cot in there and a kerosene heater he can cook on if he wants to—but he doesn't do much of that. He only stays there when he really wants to hide out. I don't think nobody knows about it but him and me."

Shayne thought, *A real den—a cave—a wild animal's hiding hole. And all within five blocks of the Courthouse Tower and a couple of the biggest department stores in the Gold Coast.*

They were walking through streets that were almost deserted right in the heart of the great sprawling city. Shayne kept to the outside of the sidewalk, away from store entrances and alley mouths where the dark figures of muggers might lie in wait.

Flashily dressed ladies of the night were already out lounging on corners or parading the walks. They left the pair alone though since he had Gloria on his arm.

"How come you know so much about Galbraith?" Shayne asked as they walked.

"I been his friend for years," she said. There was a pause, then "It's hard to explain, Mr. Shayne. Oh, I know what you think and that's true, too—or like partly true. I sleep with him sometimes only mostly that isn't it. Mostly I think he wants a part girlfriend and part mother. He talks to me."

"I see," Mike Shayne said.

"I don't know," Gloria said. "Maybe you *do* see. Bob has always been lonely. Lonely and scared—like even he was scared to be alive. I'm a fool, but I just couldn't leave him alone. Like a lost puppy he is at times—and he trusts me."

Mike Shayne surprised himself by saying, "I'm sure he's right in that, Gloria."

She flashed him a quick smile that was so genuine it made her face almost youthful. "Thanks, Mr. Shayne."

"The word is out there's a lot of money waiting for Galbraith," Shayne said. "Do you know why he hasn't tried to claim it?"

"Not really, I don't," Gloria said. "He's got to know about it. The grapevine's had it for days. I think he's afraid, Mr. Shayne. I think that has to be it."

"Afraid of what?"

"I wish I knew. I really do. Like I tried to tell you he's been afraid ever since I've known him. I think mostly af-

raid of nothing. Just afraid. Even when I sleep with him it's spoiled. I think he was born afraid. What makes a man like that?"

Shayne thought hard. Constant fear was totally alien to his own character.

"I don't know," he said. "I honestly don't know."

## VI

GLORIA LED HIM finally to the side street near Fifth Street and the River where a store had been burned out to a hollow, only partly roofed shell. The area was declining and the owner had never chosen to rebuild. Stock and fixtures had long ago been stolen. The lot back of the store had become a dump. It was choked with piles of lumber, broken trivia, the shells of old refrigerators and stoves, car fenders and the like.

In the dark, rats rustled and squeaked through the man-made jungle.

Gloria had obviously been here often before. She motioned the detective to be quiet and unerringly picked her way along a narrow twisted path through the mounded-up junk. Soon the big man could make out the shape of a sagging, decrepit old storage shed—so surrounded by junk that it seemed to support walls which other-

wise would have collapsed. It was completely dark.

Gloria reached the closed door of the shed. She tapped on it lightly in a rapid sequence that indicated a private code. There was an indistinct noise from within that might have been a voice or the sound of a body moving. The rats in the piled junk froze to silence.

Gloria repeated her tapping in the same code. There was no answer.

She called out softly, "I know you're in there, Bob. Open up. It's me—Gloria."

That was when all hell broke loose inside.

A fast volley of pistol shots sounded as if cannon were being fired inside the dark shed. Shayne's trained ear told him there were at least two guns—one either a big .45 or .358 Magnum. The second was a smaller bore weapon, what the detective would have called a popgun—a .32 or maybe even a .25 calibre.

There was one burst of firing and it was over in a couple of seconds. By that time Shayne was flattened on the trash-covered ground and had pulled Gloria down beside him and out of the line of fire from inside the shed.

None of the slugs had come through the door though. Whoever the people inside were

they hadn't been trying to hit Gloria.

Mike Shayne had his own gun out by then and was covering the shed door. There was a long shuddering groan from within the shed, then the sound of a man's voice cursing under his breath. The two outside could not make out any words.

Then they heard a scratching sound and a board cracking. Whoever was in there was forcing his way out through the back of the shed. Shayne got up, but solid piles of junk kept him from getting around either side of the shed to cut the unseen gunsel off.

He heard the man stumble a couple of times—and then he was gone.

Gloria was on her feet. In the reflected light from the street, Shayne could see that her face was drawn and anguished. Still she kept silent. The woman had courage.

Shayne put out a big hand and tried the door to the shed. To his surprise, it wasn't locked. The door creaked open on rusty hinges. Shayne pulled a pen-flashlight from the breast pocket of his jacket. The bulb shed a dim beam within the dark and cluttered shed.

There were piles of junk and an old army cot with a blanket over the foot—and there was a body, face down, on the floor.

Blood was seeping out from under the chest.

Gloria made a half-strangled sound and ran inside to cradle the body in her arms.

Mike Shayne swung the little flashlight until he located a herosene lantern hanging from the ceiling. He lit it with a match.

Gloria gasped, "For God's sake, shine the light over this way."

"Take it easy," Shayne said. "That isn't Bob Galbraith. That guy's wearing a business suit."

Gloria cried, "Oh my God!" and let the man's face fall back to the floor. Tears were running down her face. She pulled a handkerchief from her skirt pocket and wiped them away.

Shayne said, "Let me take a look." He brought the lantern over and set it on the floor. Then he took the body's wrist and checked it for a pulse. There wasn't any.

"He's dead," Shayne said.

Only then did he look at the face.

This was certainly no Skid Row bum. He was clean shaven and wore an expensive business suit—by its weight, probably bought in the North, and a white shirt and tie. He had been shot twice through the chest by a large-calibre gun. One shot had almost certainly punctured his lung. The other



Tim Rourke

had punctured the belly and adjacent vital organs.

"That sure isn't Bob," said Gloria. "He looks something like him, but he's younger and a lot fatter."

Shayne decided to take a long chance. He reached into the man's hip pocket and extracted an expensive leather wallet. A look at the identification inside showed this to be Samuel Gal-

braith. From that and the address, Shayne assumed it to be one of the two brothers of the missing man.

There were a couple of hundred dollars in bills in the wallet. So robbery had not been the motive.

Near the body on the floor lay a nickel-plated, Spanish made .32 calibre revolver. It had been fired. In the darkness and clutter of the shed, Shayne could not tell whether the bullets had gone into the walls and floor or into the body of the killer. There was blood on the floor, but it could all have come from the dead man.

"What do we do now?" Gloria asked. She was obviously fighting to keep from breaking down.

"We get out of this place before somebody comes back and takes a shot at us," Mike Shayne said.

"It wasn't Bob," Gloria said in a flat tone which told of the shock she was feeling. "I know it couldn't have been Bob."

"How do you know that?"

"Bob couldn't kill anybody. That wasn't like him. He was gentle, always, and scared like I told you. Besides he didn't even own a gun."

"You don't really know that," Mike Shayne said. "All you really know is he didn't tell you he had one. He could have had

enough guns hidden in here to outfit an army."

"It wasn't Bob—I'm sure of that."

"Come on!" Shayne said. "We can argue that point later on."

She led him back to the street after he blew out the kerosene lamp. If a rat investigating the body had knocked it over, the whole block would have gone up in flames.

Once on the street, Mike Shayne used the phone booth on the corner to make an anonymous call to the police and tell them to come pick up the body.

He had things to do that were much more important than waiting around to be questioned. This case was long beyond mere routine. A deadly killer lurked in the shadows somewhere close by, and Shayne had to find and stop him before he could strike again.

"Who knew about that shed besides you?" he asked Gloria.

"Nobody," she replied firmly. "Just Bob and me."

"Think hard," Shayne insisted. "If he took you there, he could have taken somebody else."

"No!"

"It needn't have been another woman—but it might have been. You two weren't married."

"As far as Bob is concerned,

we might as well be," Gloria told him. "He doesn't go for the broads much, and never a hooker. I'd have heard about it. He has no real men friends. Oh, he's friendly with Sam over at the pool hall, but that's different. I don't know if he's ever had a friend. Not like other men do. He's too frightened all the time. He don't trust nobody."

"Except you?"

"That's right. Nobody except me, and sometimes I wonder how much he really trusts me."

"What makes you say that?"

"Well," she said, "for one thing, he didn't tell me nothing about a lot of bread coming to him. You know about it. The grapevine knows about it. Why wouldn't he tell me?"

"I have no idea," said Shayne. "One thing more—Bob Galbraith found that shed. Any-one else on Skid Row could have found it. Do you know if any-one else used it for a place to sleep?"

"I don't know," she said. "I honestly don't. Bob likes to call it 'his' place. I never saw anybody else there when we used it. I suppose other men could locate it—that guy lying dead in there found it, didn't he?"

"Maybe he found it," Shayne said, "or maybe Bob Galbraith took him there. He wasn't a Skid Row character."

"Who was he?" Gloria asked. "I don't know." Shayne lied to her. "I looked in his wallet but I didn't recognize the name."

"Then don't accuse my Bob of killing him. I been Bob's wife for years, and he never even rolled a stiff or mugged a john—let alone killed nobody."

Shayne let that pass. "We didn't find him here," the red-head said. "At least we didn't unless he was the killer. Where else could he be?"

"Any place at all," she said. "Bob knows the weeds and the alleys like you know the inside of your own house. It would take an army to search all the places he might be holed up in. Then he might go out in the city someplace or the county."

"You sure you don't know a place?"

"I'm telling you the truth, mister. One thing, though—if he comes out of a hole at all, it's me he'll come to. I don't mean at the pool hall, but my pad."

Shayne took the address of the girl's efficiency apartment in an old and rundown downtown building.

"If he shows up, then you keep him with you till I contact you. At least he'll be safer there than on the streets. I'll keep in touch by phone or drop by. You tell him I don't mean him any harm."

She agreed. Shayne walked her to the building and watched her go the last block by herself.

## VII

THERE WAS LITTLE more Mike Shayne could do that night. To search out all the spots in which a man like Bob Galbraith might hole up was exactly what Gloria had called it—a job for an army. The detective had no intention of trying it.

He did make another swing to check the pool halls in town. They were all busy at this time of night, but he saw no one who might have been Galbraith. He didn't see anyone else trying to exhibit a crossed cues and eight-ball tattoo, either. The grapevine had evidently got word that it wasn't healthy to show that particular mark in Miami. Whoever had it would keep his arm well covered and probably stay away from pool halls completely for a while.

The last stop Shayne made that night was back at Harry's Supreme. Sam was at his usual spot at the end of the bar. He had hired a redheaded girl to replace Gloria.

He had also donned a loud checked sport-jacket over his equally loud stripped sport-shirt. It was a hot night and both shirt and jacket were

soaked with sweat. Sam was favoring his right arm and holding his glass of beer in his left hand. He raised the beer to greet Shayne when the detective came into the pool room.

"You find the man you're looking for?" Sam asked when Shayne walked over to him.

"Not yet," the big man said.

"Well, keep looking. He's bound to turn up sooner or later," Sam said. "Bad pennies always do—and that one's a bad penny if there ever was one." He uttered a loud guffaw to emphasize his point and then broke off with a wince of pain.

"You hurt yourself since I saw you?" Shayne asked.

"Yeah—stupid. I hit my elbow against the bar and damn near broke it. Hurts like the devil. Should be okay by morning, though—I hope."

"Should be," Shayne agreed. "By the way, what was the last time you saw Galbraith around here?"

"I don't remember for sure. A few days ago—maybe a few weeks. Who keeps track of a bum like that? Have a beer."

"No thanks," Shayne said. "I'm headed for the sack."

The redhead went back to the room he had rented. The first thing he did was to wedge the back of the room's single straight chair under the doorknob. Anyone could have

picked the lock with a paper clip, and the detective needed some rest.

He took off his jacket and shoes and loosened his shirt collar, tie and belt, and then stretched out on the cot that served for a bed. He put his heavy handgun under the mattress at the head of the bed.

If anyone *did* get in as he slept, he would reach under the pillow for the gun and that would wake Shayne before the intruder realized it wasn't there. It was a precaution the detective had practiced for years.

Shayne lay on his back long enough to finish the strong Tampa cigar he was smoking. Then he closed his eyes and was asleep within a few minutes.

He awoke considerably refreshed. Although the sun had not yet risen behind the towers of Miami Beach across Biscayne Bay, it was already beginning to get light outside.

Shayne rubbed his face with one big hand. He was beginning to grow a fine stiff stubble of beard.

It was still too early to contact any of the people he wanted to talk to that morning, so he made himself lie back on the cot for another hour. It gave him a chance to think over what had become one of

the most baffling cases the big man had ever tackled.

He's had puzzlers before—but this was turning out to be the most illogical of the lot. He had a missing heir who not only didn't seem to want a cool million dollars but was making desperate efforts to avoid having to take it.

He had a corpse who had been killed for impersonating the missing heir. Others as yet unknown who had also attempted impersonation. He had a barmaid who referred to herself as the missing man's wife and stoutly maintained she had never married him.

He had another dead body—the missing man's eminently respectable brother, found dead with a smoking gun in his hand in a place no respectable visiting business man could possibly be expected to be.

They were all puzzle pieces. None of them fitted together. There was no unified picture.

Shayne tugged at his left ear lobe and thought. At least one of the figures in this case was a cold-blooded killer and had already proved it twice. True to type, he would strike again unless Shayne could find him and stop him first.

Would Shayne himself be the next victim? Had the thrown knife of the day before and the attempted mugging near the

Rescue Mission been a part of the deadly picture? The big man made an educated guess that they were.

It was seven o'clock and the streets outside were beginning to fill up with early risers on their way to work, before the redhead left his rented room. On the way out, he stopped at the desk and paid for another night in the hotel. He hoped he wouldn't have to use the room again—but just in case...

His first stop was the Fifth Street branch of a chain of all-night hamburger stands. There, for a dollar, he got an egg, grits, toast and coffee. He was still hungry, but in his role of transient bum he couldn't be seen spending too much money. Accordingly he walked five blocks to one of the Biscayne Boulevard units of the same chain and had a duplicate breakfast there.

While he was eating, a man walked in and sat down beside him at the counter. The man said, "Morning, Mike."

He wore a business suit but Shayne recognized Lieutenant Maine, friend, driver and right bower of Miami Chief of Police Will Gentry.

Shayne grunted and waited for the other to continue.

"There was a body found last night in a shack off Fifth Street," Maine said. "A real

eminent character from the North. He and his brother were registered at the Columbus. What would you know about him?"

"Why should I know anything?" Mike Shayne asked.

"No reason," Maine said. "None at all, I suppose. Only some dude called in to tip us to the body. The desk sergeant who took the call has a funny notion the voice on the phone sounded like yours. Just a crazy notion."

"That's it," Shayne said through a mouthful of grits. "Just a real crazy notion."

"I was afraid you'd say that," Lieutenant Maine said. "The other brother—the one didn't get killed—is raising a lot of heat down at Headquarters and over at the States Attorney's office. Will Gentry kind of hoped the voice might have been yours and you'd come in and tell what you knew."

"That would be easy," Mike Shayne said. "I don't know who killed who. I don't know why. I don't know anything about any call to the desk. You can tell Will that for me."

"I'll tell him—but he won't like it."

Shayne stuffed the last piece of toast into his big mouth and went out onto the street, leaving the lieutenant to finish the coffee he'd ordered.

Shayne's next stop was a place maintained by the Brothers of the Good Shepherd at Northeast Seventh Street and First Avenue. There, at Camillus House, the good brothers put out a hearty meal for all comers daily at ten in the morning. When times were hard, two or three hundred men showed up for soup or stew, bread and coffee. The only rule was that a man had to wash his hands before eating.

Mike Shayne knew the brothers well and had often contributed to help buy the food they so cheerfully dispensed. He found them hard at work preparing a meal for the morning but willing to chat as they did so. None of them knew Bob Galbraith by name, although some did remember having seen the tattoo. Not recently, though.

"It's been months since that guy has been around, Mike. I honestly think he might have left town," said one of them.

Shayne walked on down to the Courthouse. There were some vital records he wanted to check. It took him an hour and a half to determine that no marriage license had ever been issued in the name of Bob Galbraith. If he had ever married Gloria, it had not been in Dade County—at least not under his own name.

Shayne called Gloria at her apartment. Her voice sounded sleepy. She hadn't heard from Galbraith.

"Come by a little later when I get my face on, Mike," she said. "I'll fix you some lunch and maybe I'll have an idea by then. There's something I'm right on the edge of remembering that might help. I can't pin it down right now."

"I'll be there," Mike Shayne said.

"Fine—and bring a bottle of gin. I'm fresh out."

"You keep a clear head," Shayne said. "Don't forget somebody mixed up with this thing is prepared to murder. If he knows you're connected with both Galbraith and me it could put you high on his list."

"All the more reason for the gin," Gloria told him. "Murder makes me nervous, and that's something I don't like—I mean being nervous."

## VIII

SHAYNE'S NEXT MOVE was to call Mr. Peters at the insurance office. "You didn't tell me that Galbraith's brothers were in town," the detective said.

"My God, man!" Peters said. "I didn't know it myself till late yesterday afternoon. I got a call from Bill Galbraith just before I left the office to say they'd

checked into a hotel here in Miami."

"What brought them down here?"

"I don't know that yet, either, Shayne. They were going to come over to my office this morning and tell me. I believe it was a long distance phone call that persuaded them to make the grip."

"Haven't you talked to him this morning?"

"Only very briefly. He's been at the police station. They called him when his brother's body was found. He has to arrange with a funeral director to prepare the body and ship it north. You understand how those things are."

"I understand I have to know about that phone call or whatever. You arrange a meeting for the three of us."

"I'll do my best," Peters promised. "How can I reach you if I set a time?"

"You can't. I'll keep in touch with *you*. Try to make it as soon as you can—and try to set a place where we can talk privately."

"I'll make it my office," the insurance executive said.

The old apartment house where Gloria lived was close to the Miami end of the MacArthur Causeway to Miami Beach. It had a view of the Bay and of the spoil banks where

the City was about to put a new park, and of the new and deluxe office building which housed the MIAMI NEWS and the MIAMI HERALD. The old apartment building predated any of these things except for Biscayne Bay itself.

Shayne cut over to Biscayne Boulevard and began to walk north. The first person he saw on the Boulevard was Sam, the proprietor and entrepreneur of Harry's Supreme Pool Hall. Harry was walking south on the same side of the street so they were bound to meet. Unlike Shayne, he was nattily dressed in a new sport-jacket and contrasting slacks. The jacket looked too large and loose.

Shayne wondered if that was to favor Sam's sore arm or to hide a shoulder-holstered gun. After a close look, his educated guess was that the man was wearing a gun.

He grinned at Shayne and stopped as the two men met. "If you don't mind my saying so, Shayne," he said, "you sure do look a mess this bright and sunny morning. Yes sir, I'd say you were the perfect picture of the south end of a northbound disaster."

"Sorry I can't say the same for you," Shayne said. The big man was hot, uncomfortable, sweaty and unwashed. He felt

like the south end of a north-bound unmentionable. "What's on your mind?"

"I might of done you a favor," Sam said.

"Oh?"

"The man you're hunting is supposed to be the biggest pool buff this burg ever saw. They say he can't miss a big match."

"We both know that," Mike Shayne said.

"Well then—I've set up something he can't refuse. I called Atlanta this morning already, and I was in luck. I talked to Side Pocket Slim up there—and for the right bread he's agreed to fly down this afternoon. Tonight, at my place, he'll put on an exhibition and then take on all challengers for side bets.

"Old Slim is one of the top men in the game. If Galbraith's in town, he'll make that scene, no matter what has him scared. I'm on my way now to see that posters are put up around town."

"How come you're willing to put up the money to bring Slim down here?" the detective asked. He thought he knew the answer, but he wanted to hear what Sam had to say about it.

"Well, it ain't exactly charity on my part," Sam admitted. "You and me both know I can make it back on the side bets—and it's bound to be good promotion for my place. The



grapevine will have it you're after some guy and that will help pack in a crowd. All in all, I don't see how I can miss making a real bundle."

Shayne nodded.

"And by the way, Shayne," Sam went on, "just exactly what are you after this Galbraith for? Some say there's a

pile of bread in it for him. According to others I've talked to, he's wanted in New York or Chicago or someplace and you're out to collect a bounty on his head. Is that it?"

"I can't answer that for you, Sam," Mike Shayne said. "Fact is, I'm not sure myself. I'm being paid by a big insurance outfit to locate the guy. They didn't tell me why they want him. As long as the pay is right, I don't really care why. Let them worry about it."

"I see."

Shayne thought *I'm glad you think you do. If somebody gave me that cock-and-bull story, I'd be absolutely sure he was crazy or lying.*

All he said was, "Thanks for telling me about the bait you're putting out."

Sam said, "See you at the big match tonight."

Shayne found Gloria in her apartment—on the floor with a rapidly swelling bruise on the back of her head where someone had sapped her expertly. That same someone had left the door to the ratty little apartment ajar so that Shayne could walk right in.

The intruder had also ripped the place and its furniture apart in the course of a highly professional search. From the looks of the room, if he hadn't found what he was looking for,

it probably hadn't been there in the first place.

Gloria was groaning and beginning to recover.

The first thing Shayne did was to make sure Gloria hadn't been seriously injured. She hadn't. Apparently a single blow to the head had knocked her out. He lifted her onto the bed and left her there while he checked over the small apartment. The intruders had been and gone. He had a suspicion they might have seen him coming through the window or have been scared off by the sound of his footsteps on the uncarpeted stairs of the old building.

Gloria opened her eyes and struggled to a sitting position. When she saw Shayne she opened her mouth to scream and then recognized him.

"Oh my God, Mr. Shayne! Is that you?" she said. "I thought for sure they were going to kill me. I swear I did."

There was a bottle of gin on the table in the kitchenette alcove—and she staggered to it and took a long pull.

"Don't take too much of that," Shayne told her. "Who were they—and what were they looking for? Can you check and tell me if they found it?"

"There were two of the big bums," she said. "I never saw either one of them before."

"How did they get in here?"

"They knocked on the door," she said. "Like a damn fool I figured it had to be you. When I cracked the door, they pushed in and one of them coldcocked me with a sap. The next thing I knew you were here."

"If you'd left the gin alone," Mike Shayne said, "You'd have made sure it was me before you opened the door."

That was her chance to tell him to get the hell out if he didn't like her drinking gin. When she didn't, he asked, "Did they get what they were after?"

If she had had something of value hidden in the room, he would have expected her to look where she had hidden it before answering. He watched her eyeballs, but they never moved. Instead, she looked right at him and said, "How the hell do I know that? I don't even *know* what they were after."

It was the wrong thing to say. A woman like Gloria would have had at least some money hidden in the apartment. She would have been worried about it, and she wasn't.

Shayne tried to fit that into the scrambled pattern of the case.

It might mean Gloria knew what the men were after and that they hadn't found it because it wasn't in the apart-

ment. It might mean she knew they had found it because she had left it out where it couldn't be missed. She might not know if what the men searched for had been found, but not want Shayne to know what it was.

There might even have been no thieves at all. Gloria could have messed up the place and hit herself on the head to make it look like a robbery. But why would she want to do a thing like that?

Shayne couldn't decide between these alternatives. He could only be sure that his instinct was right and there was something basically wrong with the picture.

Shayne decided not to show his suspicion. For the time being, he'd play along with Gloria.

"They had to be after something," he said. "In this neighborhood, it couldn't have been your jewelry. Did you have any money stashed around the pad?"

"Fat chance!" she said. "When I get a few bucks ahead, I use a bank account. They might of thought I had some bread here, though."

"So they might," Shayne said. "How about something to tie in with this Galbraith. Did he give you any presents? Did he ever leave anything personal here—like a ring or a watch?"

Did he ever ask you to keep any papers for him? Or anything else?"

Gloria didn't react to any of the question, but sat there with a face as blank as a China doll. When he finished, she shook her head.

"No, Mr. Shayne, nothing like that. I don't think he ever had none of those things—just the clothes he stood in and maybe a blanket and a kerosene lamp back at the shed."

"You never saw anything personal?" Shayne was incredulous. "Most men keep—a ring or a locket or an old snapshot of someone they loved. Don't you remember anything like that?"

"Nothing," she said. "Nothing at all. Mr. Shayne. Bob Galbraith wasn't—isn't like any other man in the world. I don't think in his whole life he ever loved another human being. Not one."

"How about you?" Mike Shayne asked directly. "You're his girl aren't you?"

"Me?" Gloria's tone was almost scornful. "His girl? You might say that. Mostly I was somebody to take care of him when he hurt and feed him when he got hungry. Once in a while he put me to bed, too, but I think that was mostly because he figured I expected him to.

His heart wasn't in it. You know..."

Mike Shayne wasn't sure. Why then did the woman, as she said, "take care of" Bob Galbraith. Could it be a twisted sort of love? Or just the sympathy she'd feel for a sick puppy?

Shayne told Gloria about the exhibition pool match that night at Harry's Supreme. She accepted the news with equanimity. "Sam does that sort of thing all the time. It's good for business, like he says."

"Will it smoke out Galbraith?" Shayne asked.

"I think it will," she answered. "That is, unless he's paralyzed with fear. I don't know what would be the most important to him—to see Side Pocket Slim or to be afraid. If he comes, he may try to disguise himself, though."

She paused a minute and then repeated that last as if to give it added emphasis. "He may try to disguise himself if he does come."

"You stay here till it's time to go to work," Shayne said. "Show up at Harry's at your usual time. I'll be there tonight. If Galbraith calls or comes here before work time, you call my office. My secretary will know how to find me. Just call and keep him here till I show up."

She reached for the bottle

and downed another belt, said, "Okay, Mr. Shayne. Whatever you say."

## IX

SHAYNE WENT BACK to the Boulevard and found a pay phone. He put through a call to Vice President Peters at the insurance company office.

"Come right on down," Peters told Shayne. "I'll have Bill Galbraith in my office by the time you get here. I think you'll be interested in what he has to say. It changes the whole picture."

"I'm on my way," Mike Shayne said. "You'd better warn him I look like a bum, though."

"He thinks all private investigators are bums," Peters said. "Don't let it bother you a bit." He hung up.

Shayne made it to the office building in record time. It got him sweating and that made the other elevator passengers pull away from him. This amused the big man wryly.

Peters wasn't worried about how Shayne looked or smelled. He had him hurried into his private office and supplied a long, strong Tampa cigar and a glass of the detective's favorite Martell brandy.

Shayne leaned back in the comfortable office chair and let

himself relax in air-conditioned ease for the first time in two days. Bill Galbraith came in from the hallway a few moments later. They shook hands.

Shayne could see a resemblance to the body he'd found the night before on the floor of the shack near Fifth Street. This man was a couple of years younger, but had the same cast of features and the same comfortable wealthy look.

The events of the past twenty-four hours had obviously shaken him up. The right side of his face twitched as he talked. At first, he stood over by the window, looking out. Then he began to pace back and forth between the window and the desk as he talked.

"This is Mr. Shayne, the private investigator I told you about," Peters said by way of introduction.

"Have you found Bob yet?" Galbraith demanded rather than asked.

"I haven't actually seen him yet," Mike Shayne said.

"Well, why haven't you? You were hired to find him and Peters, here, promised me you would do it."

"That was good of him," Shayne said. He was deciding that he didn't like the youngest of the three Galbraith brothers.

"Hold on now," Peters said. "I promised you Shayne would lo-

cate your brother if he could be found. I didn't put a time limit on it, and I didn't guarantee your brother was even in Dade County.

"In due time, Mr. Shayne will tell us that. Meanwhile you better take my word for it that he's the best in the business in this area, maybe in the country. Let him do his job and cooperate any way he wants you to. That's my considered advice."

Bill Galbraith continued to pace back and forth between the window and the desk for a couple of minutes. Then he stopped, still looking out over the Bay, and spoke hastily.

"Okay, okay. I guess I'd better do as you say. What do you want from me, Mr. Shayne?"

"The first thing I want," Shayne said, "is some information. I'm going to ask a few questions—and I want the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Is that perfectly clear?"

"It had better be," Mr. Peters put in.

"Okay," Bill Galbraith repeated. "Okay! I told you I'd cooperate. What do you want to know?"

"Why did you and your brother come down here? Why didn't you let Mr. Peters *know* you were coming so he could notify me? If you had, there's a

very good chance your brother might be alive and well right now."

"We were told to come and what hotel to check in and not to tell anyone we were coming," Galbraith replied.

"That's fine," Shayne said. "Who told you?"

"I don't know. There was a phone call from Miami. Sam took the call and the caller didn't give his name."

"His name? Are you sure the caller was a man and not a woman?"

"How do *I* know?" Galbraith said. "I told you Sam took the call. I never heard the voice."

"Just fine," Mike Shayne repeated. "A strange voice on the phone tells you to go against a responsible insurance firm that's working for you—and you fall for it."

He paused, added. "Why? Can you tell me *why* you didn't at least notify Mr. Peters and me?"

"Sam wouldn't let me," Galbraith insisted. "He said the man who called would show us Bob—for a price. He knew where Bob was hiding and would take us there for a thousand dollars. We should take his advice and check into the hotel and he'd call us there. He wouldn't give his name. He just said to bring the thousand dollars in cash and keep our

mouths shut. Sam said it was worth taking the chance."

"Sam gambled and lost," Shayne said. "He wasn't exactly what I'd call smart."

"The thousand dollar part should have tipped you," Peters said. "A million dollars is involved and this voice only asks for a thousand!"

"We didn't think of it that way."

"I guess you didn't," Shayne said. "Well, what happened? I suppose the man called and Sam went to meet him. Why didn't you go along?"

"He said for one of us to come, not both. He would only meet one man. Sam was the elder, so he went. He took a gun."

"That's right," Peters added. "The police found a gun on his body—a Colt forty-five."

Shayne had trouble keeping a straight face. The gun he's seen with San Galbraith hadn't been any .45. The killer must have come back and switched guns during the time after Shayne and Gloria left the shack and the police arrived. He must have been nearby the whole time Shayne and Gloria were in the shed.

Why had he switched the guns? At this point, Shayne had no idea. He put the fact in his mental file for future solution.

"That's all you can tell us?" he asked.

"That's all. I waited in the room, expecting Sam to call or come back and bring Bob with him. When so much time went by, I got worried. But what could I do? *Nothing!* I didn't even know where Sam had gone."

"So?"

"So the next thing that happened, the police called. They said they had Sam's body—that he had been killed in some awful slum hole. They wanted me to come down and confirm the identification of the body and answer some questions."

"He told them all he knew," Peters said. "He told them why we were looking for Bob Galbraith and that you were on the case."

"I guessed as much when Lieutenant Maine looked me up this morning."

"So much for that," Peters said. "What should we do now?"

"As far as Galbraith, here, is concerned," Mike Shayne said, "I think you'd better take him home with you to your house in South Miami for dinner and the night. Don't even go by the hotel. Just take him with you. He isn't to leave you for even five minutes for any reason."

"Why?"

"Because I want him safe," Shayne said. "I don't want him

going off half-cocked and getting killed."

"Me—killed?" Galbraith asked.

"Yes, *you!* Whoever took the trouble to bushwack your brother Sam probably wants you dead, too."

"Oh, my *God!*" Galbraith said. "What can I do?"

"You do as I say," Shayne said. "Get out of here and stay with Mr. Peters. You'll be safe there at least overnight. If things aren't cleared up by tomorrow, I'd suggest that you fly back north. On the other hand, I'm pretty sure I can get this case solved tonight."

"How are you going to do that?"

"When Mike Shayne says he's going to do something I don't ask questions," Peters said. "My experience is that he'll do just what he says. Of course, you'll spend the night with me."

"By morning," the detective assured them, "I expect to know where Bob Galbraith is and, at the least, be able to take you to him. I'll also know who killed your brother Sam and why."

"Just a couple more questions," he added. "When Sam left you last night, was he carrying much money? Did you see the gun he took? Did he expect to bring Bob back with him?"

"As far as I know he had the

thousand dollars the caller asked for with him in a manila envelope," Bill Galbraith said. It was in small bills as requested. He told me he had a gun but I didn't see it. He expected to be taken to talk to Bob. That's all I know. Of course he would have brought Bob back if he'd come. But, of course, he didn't find Bob. All he found was that filthy shack where the body was."

"He found more than that," Shayne said. "He found somebody who killed him."

"Oh!"

"Something else you'd better not forget," Shayne said. "Whoever took him to that shack took him to the right place. The shack has been Bob Galbraith's home for at least the past three years."

"Oh, *no!*" the dead man's brother said. "Oh, my God, *no!*" He sounded sick.

## X

THE DISCUSSION in the insurance company office ended there. Mike Shayne went back to his hotel room to catch a couple of hours' much needed rest. He also wanted to be available in case anyone wished to contact him before the evening's exhibition of fancy pool shots at Harry's Supreme.

He wasn't too sure who might

contact him. It could be Gloria wanting to change her story.

By now, Shayne was ready to make a highly educated guess as to who the killer was and where Bob Galbraith might be found. If he was right, then Gloria knew a lot more than she had admitted.

He thought he had already figured out most of what she could tell him, but he wanted to hear it from her own lips. If she talked voluntarily, it would do a lot to clear her of the growing suspicion in his mind. He had told her where he was staying.

Gloria didn't show up. Neither did anyone else.

After a while Mike Shayne went to sleep. He had the chair braced under the doorknob again.

He woke about seven in the evening and went out to eat. There was a cheap restaurant on Fifth Street where he could get a hot and filling goulash with rolls and coffee and a huge wedge of apple pie. Shayne ate at the counter, oblivious of the stares of the other diners—some of whom probably recognized him. By now, news of his search for the tattooed man and its fatal consequences must be keeping the grapevine busy all through the heart of town.

Shayne ate as if he neither knew nor cared.

When he left the restaurant,



he wasn't really surprised to be called over to a car parked at the curb outside. He had seen it drive up while he ate and recognized Lieutenant Maine behind the wheel.

"I've a message for you from Will Gentry," the police officer said.

"Tell him no," Shayne said and started to light one of his long Tampa cigars.

"You haven't even heard the message yet," the other said.

"Whatever it is the answer is no," Shayne repeated. "Tell the Chief I'll have this mess under control if I'm not interfered with."

Lieutenant Maine said, "The Chief figures you're going to Side Pocket Slim's exhibition tonight. It could be dangerous. He says he'll have a couple of the boys there to back you up."

Tell him to keep the boys away," Shayne said. "One known cop in that place tonight can ruin everything I have set up. Just one, and the killer will go to cover. We may never be able to smoke him out again. You tell Chief Gentry I know what I'm doing."

"I'll tell him," Maine said, "but I don't know what he'll do. When the killing started, this stopped being a private case and began to be police business. You know that."

"Just tell him what I said," Shayne repeated.

He purposely didn't show up at Harry's Supreme Pool Hall until after ten that night. He wanted the action to be well under way before he arrived—and it was.

The big room was wall-to-wall pool buffs except for a cleared space around the table where Side Pocket Slim was doing his stuff. Men were three deep at the bar, behind which Gloria and two other barmaids

were busily drawing and dispensing the beer and wine. Sam was in his usual place at the end of the bar.

Shayne stayed well back in the crowd. If there was action for him here tonight, he wouldn't have to search it out. It would come to him.

For a moment, he watched the play at the center table under the lights. Shayne wasn't enough of a pool shark to appreciate what was being done there. He could tell that some of Side Pocket's shots were spectacular. He knew some were next to impossible by the awed looks on the faces of the real aficionados. But that was all.

He did know that if he was the sort of pool buff that Bob Galbraith was reputed to be, he'd be here tonight even at the risk of his life. So Shayne waited.

After a while, he sensed he was being watched. He sensed it by the way his stomach got tight and the hair on the back of his neck bristled. He just knew it.

He didn't turn and look around. He just stood with the sweating and eager men packed around him. And he waited.

Shayne's back was against the wall. He liked it that way and was tall enough to see over the heads of most of the men

in the room. He was safe from attack from behind and could still follow the action.

Then he became aware of a shift at his left shoulder. A man moved to be next to him.

"Mr. Shayne," the voice said in his ear. "I'm the man you want. I'm Robert Galbraith. I want to talk to you."

It was a cool and controlled voice—the voice of an educated man. The speaker was nearly as tall as Shayne, but a great deal thinner. His face was stubbled, lean, with high cheek bones. He wore dirty slacks, a sport shirt and an ancient jacket. The sleeves covered any tattoo he might have had.

The man said, "I'm no fool. I'm not showing any tattoo in this town tonight. I want to talk."

"Talk, then," Shayne said.

He noticed that the fellow wasn't looking at him. He was watching the action at the pool table.

"Not here. We can go out into the alley where it's quiet. This won't take long."

Shayne thought, "I'll bet it won't."

They pushed through the crowd to get to the door and out into the alley, where Shayne had talked to another man the night before. He sneaked a look at the bar. Gloria was definitely watching them as she

worked. Her expression was unreadable but her eyes followed them.

Once in the alley, the man said to Shayne, "I guess I owe you an explanation. I'm Robert Galbraith—"

"The hell you are," Shayne interupted.

The man fell back a step. His right hand slipped into his jacket pocket. "What's the matter with you, Shayne?" he said. "I know who I am."

"I don't even care who you are," Shayne said in a low, angry tone. "I *know* where Galbraith is."

The man said, "I wish you'd give me a chance to explain..." but he was only talking to distract the big detective. Even as he spoke, his hand came out of his pocket holding an opening switch-blade knife. He slashed viciously at Shayne's belly.

As if on signal, two other men came out of the shadows in the rear of the alley and started to run toward them.

Shayne's left hand caught the wrist of the first attacker behind the knife hand, clamped like a vise and twisted till a bone snapped.

At the same time, he chopped a hard right to the man's jaw that put him out of the picture.

The two other men, who had been standing well back in the shadows of the alley near the

rear door of Harry's Supreme, were already sprinting up as fast as they could. One of them had a knife out and the other was trying to pull a gun from under his jacket. The gun caught on either the belt or the jacket.

Shayne was still holding the broken wrist of the man who claimed to be Bob Galbraith. He yanked hard and pulled the body erect.

Then he grabbed it by the upper arm and the belt and pulled it up so he was holding it in front of him at about chest height. He ran down the alley towards his two attackers and threw the unconscious Galbraith impersonator in their faces as he came.

The impact jarred and tangled them for a moment—and that gave Shayne the edge he needed. He swung his right fist against the jaw of the man with the knife, knocking him out and down.

The other finally got his gun out. Shayne clamped down on his gun hand and broke its fingers against the cold metal.

Then he swung to face the sound of feet running in from the front of the alley. When he saw who was coming, he relaxed.

It was Lieutenant Maine and two detectives of the Miami Homicide Squad.

"I've got a present for you," Shayne said as they came up. He was still holding the man with the gun and now he hauled him around so the light struck his face.

"Book this one," Shayne said, "for muder one—three counts."

"Three counts?" Maine sounded incredulous.

"The tattooed bum you found by the river last night," Shayne said. "Then Sam Galbraith—those two for sure. I'm pretty sure the third is Bob Galbraith, the man I've been hunting."

The man he was still holding was Sam—the owner of Harry's Supreme.

## XI

AN HOUR LATER, Mike Shayne was explaining it all to Chief Will Gentry in the latter's downtown office. With them, were Bill Galbraith and Mr. Peters, who had been hastily called in by phone.

"In the beginning, I had nothing at all to go on," Shayne said. "I didn't have a reason for Galbraith to be hiding out when he had a million dollars waiting for him. When the killings started I didn't have a motive for them except that same million dollars, and I couldn't tie that to a dead bum out by the river. The fact I was attacked meant somebody was

trying to get me out of the way, but didn't solve anything else.

"I had to start from scratch and build the whole picture—and that's what I did. "This is the way it shaped up.

"After a while, I began to feel sure that Bob Galbraith was dead. Even the people who knew him hadn't seen him for a long while. Only Gloria claimed she had—and after a while I had reason not to believe her. I figured my man had either died of natural causes or been killed soon after he talked to his mother two years back. I think you'll find him buried in that lot where his shack is."

"His mother told him about the million and he must have talked. That gave the killer a motive.

"With Galbraith dead, somebody figured a way to get that million all for himself. It had to be somebody who knew the whole story—and that meant somebody close to Gloria.

"Gloria was Bob's woman for several years. If she was his widow, she'd inherit. She never really married him—I checked the courthouse—but I'm sure she was his common law wife. That was legal in Florida when they started going together. There must be letters in which he refers to her as his *wife*, and that's all she'd need.

"However, she wasn't really

supposed to inherit. The killer was. Once Gloria had the money, he would force her to marry him and then kill her.

"The only man who fitted that picture was Sam. He got a couple of bums to tattoo their arms. He killed one—maybe he hoped his body would be mistaken for Bob's.

"He lured Bob's two brothers to Miami to kill them both, so there would be no other heirs to contest Gloria's claim. As it turned out only Sam Galbraith went to the shack. Harry shot him but took a small caliber bullet in the arm. He went back and switched guns so his wound couldn't be connected.

"Just to be on the safe side, he beat up Gloria and took the proof of her common law marriage she was holding. Then he must have realized I was getting close to him.

"The whole business of Side Pocket Slim tonight was only to lure me to the pool hall. The phoney Bob Galbraith was to get me into the alley, where I could be killed. If I hadn't already figured Bob Galbraith was dead, it just might have worked."

Mike Shayne leaned back in his chair and took a long drink of his friend Chief Gentry best brandy.

After a moment the others joined him.

# VINCENT TERESA: Bum on the Run

Another TRUE CRIME MAFIA Masterpiece

by DAVID MAZROFF



HE IS A big bum named Vincent Teresa. Not only is he a bum but he is a bum on the run because there is a price tag on his head, \$500,000 to anyone who kills him. Efficient Syndicate killers are looking for him, eager to earn the half-million dollars.

As Joe Louis once said of his opponents, "They can run but they can't hide. I'll catch 'em!"

One, two or three of the killers will find Teresa sooner or later. He has changed his appearance drastically. He reduced his weight, underwent plastic surgery, communicates with no one in his family or any of his old friends. He dares

not. He cannot trust anyone. More, to let any member of his family know of his whereabouts would place them in jeopardy.

He lives a lonely, fearful life, running from city to city, staying in cheap hotels, in rooming houses, eating in his room most of the time, sandwiches, beer, cheese and crackers. The old life when he ate in the best restaurants, lived in a fine house, moved about freely, enjoyed the gay nightlife, is gone. There is only one end to his flight—violent death.

What brought Vincent Teresa to this dismal point in his life? He turned stoolie, the first Mafia figure in the higher ech-

*What possible motive causes a man like Vincent Teresa, born to the Syndicate Purple, to turn informer against his former colleagues and thus condemn himself, his wife and his two children to the wretched undercover existence of fugitives from mob vengeance? Here, David Mazroff traces the step by step process that led Teresa from proud Mafia Don to just a bum on the run.*



lons of a national "family" to turn informer.

Vincent Teresa was no ordinary hood like Joe Valachi. Unlike Valachi, who was used as an enforcer along with another member of the mob, Teresa went it alone, a brutal, abysmal assaulter of men, maiming and wreaking Mafia vengeance on those who had violated the dictums of the Syndicate. He was feared, as he fears today. He stalked as he is stalked.

Only today, as he flees across the country, there is not one man out to kill him but a hundred in every city, town, hamlet, for the tentacles of the National Organization are spread across the nation. In each of these cities and towns a killer walks the streets hoping to find Teresa and reap the riches of his death.

Teresa's excuse for turning stoolie is that he was double-crossed by men he called his friends, hoods he had worked with, had trusted, as they trusted him. The irony in this is that the Mafia philosophy declares you can double-cross a member of any family because he wronged you but the tale you bear must go directly to the Council and not to police authorities. That is the unforgivable sin, the violation of the Code of Omerta.

Personally, Vincent Teresa is

an intelligent man, like most of those who have moved up to leadership in the underworld structure that is known as The Organization. It is seldom if ever referred to as the Mafia by those who are part of it.

In the three or four years that he has been a government informer, Teresa has given information that led to the conviction of some fifty members of the Organization, most of them close to the top. He has exposed the ways and means of how the Organization moves into legitimate businesses, the manner of the takeover, first as partners, then muscling out the original owners.

He has revealed how the mob operates its crooked casinos, the gamblers who fleece legitimate businessmen in fixed horse races, crooked dice and poker games, in gin and bridge. He has revealed instances of rivalry that led to gang wars and dozens of killings, to stock thefts. He himself was involved in all of these except one—murder.

Teresa has refused to say if he ever killed, because then there would be no immunity for him. He has admitted to hundreds of swindles in every form, because he is highly imaginative and an innovator. During the years he operated in New England, he stole millions of

dollars and trained others in the mob to do the same, taking a piece of the action:

Today, under the Organized Crime Control Act of 1970, he gets a little over a thousand dollars a month from the government as long as he remains a federal witness. To him, that's peanuts. He is anxious, according to certain sources of information, to break away from the government's hold on him but he is guarded around the clock. He cannot move without the cover of a deputy marshal on his tail. That isn't enough to thwart the killers who are searching for him.

Teresa's grandfather was a Mafia Don in Sicily who came to the United States in 1895. He was welcomed by the leaders of the Black Hand, the forerunner of what was to become the sinister mobs of The Organization, men like Big Jim Colosimo in Chicago and later Johnny Torrio and Al Capone—like Giuseppe Masseria and Salvatore Maranzano in New York who were followed by Lucky Luciano, Joe Adonis, Vito Genovese and others, and so on down the line throughout the country. Vincent Teresa thus grew up in an atmosphere of mobdom.

As a bright young man he was given pieces of action. He proved himself again and again

in every undertaking and was given bigger pieces of action. He had bookie joints, a small gambling casino, a loan-shark setup. However, he found that he could make a lot more money in swindles. His ability at concocting various con games came naturally from a heritage handed down by his father and grandfather.

Don Vincenti Teresa, according to Vincent Teresa, his grandson, was born a Sicilian duke, a member of the House of Bourbon that ruled the Kingdom of Naples and the Two Sicilies. He became a *pezzi da novanta*, a big shot in the Friends of Friends who were horse thieves, robbers and swindlers and exacted tribute from the aristocracy. In a moment of fitful anger, Don Vincenti Teresa killed a man. The carabiniere were sent to arrest him on a charge of murder.

He gathered together what valuables and money he could and, with his bride, Katerina, fled before the police could arrest him. The two were put aboard a fishing boat for North Africa. There they were smuggled aboard a ship bound for Boston.

Many of the Sicilians and Italians who fled their countries for one reason or another and came to the United States under forged passports or were

smuggled in found work with the Mustache Petes, the ruling mobsters of the day before Lucky Luciano ordered their final and complete extermination so that he could take over. Others opened up barber shops, butcher shops, fish or produce markets.

Don Vincenti Teresa established himself in the produce business in Little Italy. Within a year, he had organized a small mob and one of the rackets he immediately established was the protection of merchants. Protection was new to law enforcement officers. Not so to Sicilians.

Those who didn't pay tribute to Don Vincenti found all sorts of "accidents" happening to them. Their fruit and produce was stolen, their pushcarts turned over or burned, their meat ruined by saturation in kerosene. If these things did not tell them the necessity of protection then violence to their persons followed.

Small gang wars followed Don Vincenti's expansion in the rackets. He always came out on top and eventually several of these small mobs merged, with Don Vincenti as the ruling head.

Don Vincenti's family grew as he grew in wealth and power. Katerina gave him three sons and four daughters. Cos-

mo, the first born, was to become the father of Vincent. Cosmo was as intelligent as Don Vincenti was cruel and ruthless. He had no desire to follow in his father's footsteps, hated what his father did and would have none of it. He was a biological sport.

He was a good student, sought always to improve himself, loved music and the arts, was a good husband and father. With a father like that, and the home in which he grew up, Vincent should have turned out to be anything but what he became. However, he loved the fast buck and a lot of it, beautiful women, the race tracks, the gay nightlife, expensive cars and clothes.

His rise in the mob was done on his own because his grandfather died before Vincent was born. Don Vicenti died of natural causes. On November 28, 1928, Vincent Teresa was born. It was to prove a fateful day for many top mobsters because from that date circumstances were to develop that would send them to prison for long terms or for the rest of their lives.

The chain of circumstances that developed from the date of Vincent's birth began to forge itself when his father died suddenly on January 7, 1961. Teresa loved his father, and if

that's a point in his favor it is one of few. At the wake there were a large number of Mafioso who had come to pay their respects. Among them was Joe Zerilli of Detroit, a kingpin and a power in the National Organization. It puzzled Teresa because his father had never had anything to do with the rackets. Zerilli straightened him out.

He took Teresa to one side, put a hand on his shoulder, said, "Vince, I know you're wondering why I and some of the other boys are here. It's simple. If your father had wanted it, he could have been on top like your grandfather. He could have had anything he wanted, or taken over from your grandfather when the old man died. He never wanted it and we respected him for it. That's why we're here, to pay our respects to an honorable man."

That speech wasn't as antithetic as it sounds. The top men in the National Organization respect honor, more so among their own kind. Absolute fidelity to their code is what carried them to the top, along with, of course, organizational ability and high intelligence. This is not intended to be an accolade for those in the Syndicate but the fact remains that it does contain undeniable verity.

#### EARLY INCORRIGIBLE

IN HIS YOUTH, Vincent Teresa hung out in poolrooms with older boys. He wasn't a good pool player and lost whatever money was given him as an allowance. So he teamed up with two other youths and they burglarized a meat market on Harvard Street in Medford. The three were apprehended by the police. At the trial, Teresa was paroled in the custody of his parents. His father and mother raved at him for bringing such shame to the family.

"It is enough already what your grandfather and your uncles have done to the name of Teresa. I should beat the hell outta you. If there is a next time I will. I will beat you half to death!"

There was a next time. Teresa's father got him a job at the Royal Tomato Company. Vincent noticed that officials of the company left a lot of cash in one of the drawers of a desk. One day he stole the keys to the office from the janitor, had a duplicate set made and then returned the keys, dropping them into the pocket of the coat where the janitor carried them.

The next night, together with one of the boys who had been with him in the meat market burglary, he got into the office, went to the desk drawer and

removed the money. On their way out, they broke a rear window leading to the office to make it look like a burglary. Their loot totaled a little over fifteen hundred dollars.

Teresa went through his half of the stolen money in two weeks. He got into trouble with his father shortly after, when he lost the twenty dollars his mother had given him to buy meat. He had dropped the money shooting pool. His father beat him unmercifully. He took the blows without flinching, knowing that he deserved it. He had been bitten by the gambling bug and was beyond help.

The fever drove him to more burglaries, more gambling, and finally he went to a loan shark. Bobby Visconti, the loan shark, knew the power of the Teresa name and talked Vincent into a partnership in crime. This time, the crimes were bigger—heists, shakedowns, knocking off liquor trucks, bookie joints, and then trouble with the crime boss of Medford. He was ticketed for a one-way ride to oblivion when his father learned of it. The elder Teresa went to the crime boss.

"I hear you're planning to hurt my boy. If you do, I'm going to make a phone call to some friends who will cut your heart out." He turned without

another word and stalked out. That was all it took.

On November 29, 1945, the day after he became seventeen, Vincent Teresa joined the navy. There was nothing patriotic about this. He didn't have anywhere to go. All the guys he gambled with, stole with, palled around with, were in the service. His father approved.

"Good, good. Join the navy. It may make a man of you."

Before Vincent was shipped out he said some bood-byes to a few friends, including a lovely young girl named Lola Lawlis who saw nothing in Vincent that appealed to her. She knew his reputation and refused to date him. Vincent thought she was shy and would grow out of it. She wasn't shy and she never grew out of her disregard for him. Her family hated his guts but his family thought the sun rose and set on her.

After he finished boot training at Bainbridge, Maryland, he was assigned to a destroyer sailing to the Mediterranean. He was constantly in trouble. Every time the ship would hit port and he would get a twenty-four liberty he would be AWOL for two days, drinking and living it up with the broads who frequented the area hoping to be picked up by a sailor who would spend money on them. He was repeatedly restricted to

the ship or placed in the brig for several days. He was always fined for these infractions and never drew a dime of pay during the three years he was in the service. Luck and opportunity came to his aid.

Teresa got a bright idea the day his ship came into Port Lerapetra, off the southern coast of Crete. He broached his idea to a friend on board. As he spoke, he could see that Frank's eyes were alight with the possibilities of great amounts of cash.

He said to Frank, "I'll go ashore and see if I can contact one of those guys who deal in the black market. There must be dozens of them around."

Frank said, "Are you sure we can get away with this?"

"Sure," Teresa snapped. "It's a cinch. Look, we throw the stuff overboard, don't we? So why not sell it? The people here are hungry. There's very little food they can buy. It's not like we're stealing the stuff, is it?"

Frank agreed. "Yeah, you're right. Gee, we should make a mint!"

"We will."

Teresa made the rounds of the bars in town and talked to several bartenders. He was given the names of two black-market operators in the area. They were interested.

A deal was made to sell them



JOE MASSERIA

about twenty cases of butter Teresa and Frank were told to dump. Each case weighed twenty-four pounds. Teresa said he wanted a dollar a pound for the butter. There was no argument over the price.

"All you guys have to say is that you're hauling the stuff away to dump it out to sea. You have a barge, yes?"

"We will get one," one of the operators said.

Back aboard ship, Frank, who was in charge of the commissary, told the officers that he had made arrangements to have a barge dump the ship's garbage out at sea for a price of ten dollars. The officers thought

it was a good idea because then they wouldn't be criticized for littering the harbor with garbage. They agreed to pay the ten dollars.

The scheme worked perfectly. The two did the same thing in ports from Tangiers to Naples. They sold not only butter but hundred-pound sacks of flour that had got a little wormy from the dampness in the hold. They did the same with whole hams and even hindquarters of beef they were told to get rid of. They were rolling in money.

They now decided to run dice and poker games. When they got some yokels in a dice game, they would run in a pair of crooked dice and take the group for all they had. Vincent told Frank, "If I didn't like the bunch of money we're making, and hated the brig so much I'd reenlist. That's the rub. I think I've spent more time in that lousy brig than all the guys aboard put together."

Teresa and trouble were partners. Finally, in Boston, the trouble got serious. He was a nasty drunk. On this night he got into a fight in a bar with a Marine captain and beat him severely. He was arrested and thrown into the brig, tried and given a general court-martial. He got sixty days on bread and water and a bad conduct discharge. For some reason they

suspended the sentence and gave him a second chance.

He was sent back to the ship and ordered to stand extra guard detail at night. Cooks weren't supposed to stand guard duty but he was a special case and the officers were trying to straighten him out. It was hopeless. He got into a fight with a lieutenant one night when he was on guard duty. The lieutenant was drunk and cursed Teresa. Teresa hit him with the butt of his gun and knocked him cold.

That was the end. His sentence on the previous charge was reinstated and he was shipped to the Brooklyn armed guard center. The bad conduct discharge was also reinstated and he was mustered out with a suit of clothes and twenty dollars. That didn't bother him a bit because he had almost fifteen grand in cash stuffed in his dufflebag.

In a little over six months Teresa went through all his money. He was now a confirmed thief, burglar, hustler, anything at all that would bring in a buck. He had set the pattern for his life as a youth and his sojourn in the navy developed it. He tied in with two hoodlums, Joe "Putsy" Puzzangara and Jimmy Coyne. They all had a great deal in common. They were suckers for the horses,

card and dice games. All were expert burglars.

In the next two months the three committed more than a dozen burglaries. The scores were high and low, from a few hundred dollars to as high as twenty or twenty-five thousand. Teresa blew all of it gambling.

On March 7, 1949, Teresa and Blanche Bosselman were married. Blanche was a home-type girl. All she wanted was a home and children. She got both but she had to put up with a lot before, during and for a long time after for it.

#### GETTING BIGGER

UNTIL 1950, when President Truman ordered Attorney General J. Howard McGrath to form a National Conference on Organized Crime, New England's crime bosses moved about freely. They succeeded, by a carefully laid plan, in corrupting public officials and police officers, and establishing a gambling empire that brought in millions of dollars. But now the heat was on.

Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee launched an intensive investigation against the National Organization. The boss of New England was Joseph Lombardo who lived in Tudor splendor on a vast estate named Pinetree Stables in

Framingham, Massachusetts. It was anything but a riding academy. Outwardly, it was a breeding farm for thoroughbred race horses. In truth, and secretly, it served as a meeting ground for hoods in the National Syndicate.

The men who came there were the elite in the Organization—Carlos Marcello from Louisiana, Tony Salerno, the racket king of Harlem, Stefano Magaddino of Buffalo, Frankie Cucchiara of Boston, Mickey Rocco, also of Boston, Frank Morelli, crime boss of Rhode Island, and his eventual successor, Salvatore Patriarca. Vincent Teresa, through his uncle Sandy, was invited to one of the meetings.

Lombardo took a liking to the huge young man whose grandfather had been a Don and whose uncles were in solid with the National Organization. He gave him small pieces of action. He earned enough to keep him and his wife comfortable but mere comfort wasn't enough for Vincent Teresa. He needed money to gamble, to live the fast life with the boys despite the fact he was married. Blanche never questioned his absences.

In order to play the role of big shot gambler and playboy Teresa, borrowed money from loan sharks, among them Sal-

vatore Cesario, who was a tough hood, an animal when someone owed him money and didn't pay. Vincent soon owed Cesario a thousand dollars and was being pressed. He also owed Visconti two grand.

Visconti put him onto a good thing. He told him about Pasquale "Patsy" Varto, the manager and owner of Columbus Associates, a loan company. Varto loaned money to anyone who could get a co-signer.

Visconti said, "Go to this old creep and give him one of your stories. With your line of bull you'll own his joint in six months."

Varto was an old line Italian, a nice guy who believed he was rendering a service to the community by helping those in need. He was, however, a sucker for a sob story. Teresa was a master at sob stories. If he ever had a conscience, it had left him long ago. He would use anyone, steal from anyone. He went to Varto.

Varto listened to him. He explained that he ran a credit union for all the Italians who didn't trust banks and put their money into his keeping. This money, he went on, was used to make loans and the interest earned was divided among those who invested in the credit union. Varto, like the old Italians who invested their sav-

ings with him, spoke broken English. He was, however, the soul of honor. He trusted everyone.

Teresa talked him out of a two-thousand dollar loan and paid off Cesario. The other thousand he kept for himself. His luck was bad and he blew the thousand at the track. He went back to Varto and arranged "Tombstone" loans, using the names of long-dead men.

He would walk into Varto's office on the second floor, give him a big smile and say, "Patsy, I'm gonna make you rich. I've got a lot of people who need loans and I recommended them to you. Right now I've got this man, Mike O'Connell. He runs a fruit market. He needs two grand. I'll co-sign for him."

Varto extended an application form. Teresa filled it out, signed both names and handed it back to Varto, who wrote him a check for the two thousand dollars.

Teresa made about forty such loans from the old man totaling over seventy thousand dollars. He was, in the parlance of the street, a real sonofabitch. In time, as Varto tried to collect his money from Teresa and failed, he took him to court. Teresa won on legal technicalities. Varto had to admit to shoddy loan practices.

He admitted never having seen, talked to, or investigated the persons he had approved for loans. He couldn't find them, identify them or give a reason for the loans. That was understandable. They were all dead and buried.

Varto taught Teresa an important lesson. Vincent was convinced now that he could make a sucker of any man with his line of con. Like most con-men he had the patience and the ability to appraise his victim, to determine his weakness and play to it before he bled him to death. He became a short-con artist and it became his means of support.

There was no sophistication to his methods as was the case in those used by Yellow Kid Weil and his partner Fred Buckminster, two of the wiliest con-men who ever lived. Teresa was still a penny-ante hood, a compulsive gambler, and his friends and allies were the guys in the street—gunmen, burglars, bookies, small-time loan-sharks. He had not yet been taken in by the mob elite despite the fact that Joseph Lombardo had given him bits and pieces of action.

Teresa told himself at this point that he needed a cover for his operations. His choice as an operational front was an ice cream bar in Somerville, Mas-

sachusetts. The ice cream bar was a sort of front or branch office for Robert Visconti. Teresa handled numbers for Visconti and on the side handled stolen goods as a fence. He peddled numbers to the kids who came in for an ice-cream cone, for nickles, dimes, and quarters, and to their parents for as high as a dollar.

Occasionally, there was a payoff to keep the suckers coming. In addition, he sold hot stuff of every kind—jewelry, appliances, cameras, guns, and even foodstuffs, canned goods, at far below the market price. He had police protection which Visconti arranged. And then opportunity for a real killing came his way.

#### OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

FRANK METRANO, owner of Metrano's Sun Oil Company of Somerville, came into the store one day. Teresa owed him thirty dollars for oil. He had been out the entire night playing cards and losing. He looked beat. He had a headache and wondered where he could pick up a grand that he owned in markers.

Metrano said, "You look a little the worse for wear. You got money trouble maybe?"

Teresa's eyes opened wide and his mind began to work on

all wheels. "Yeah," he said, "I have. I could use a grand right now."

"I could let you have it," Metrano said.

"At what rates?"

"No rates. I lend money to a lot of my customers." He reached into his pocket and counted out a thousand dollars.

Teresa said, "I'll pay this back in a week."

A week later, Metrano came in to service the store with oil and Teresa handed him a thousand and fifty dollars. "That's for being a good guy," Teresa said.

"Fifty bucks interest for a week?" Metrano said. "Say, that's great. You can come to me anytime."

Teresa did. He played Metrano as a virtuoso plays a Stradivarius. He would borrow a thousand dollars and a week later pay it back, adding fifty dollars interest. After four such loans he knew that he now had Metrano in his hip pocket. The next loan was for two thousand dollars which he didn't pay back but gave Metrano a hundred in interest. Metrano was happy. The first scheme Teresa worked on Metrano was the hot goods deal, as phony as a three-dollar bill.

The mob had connections with crooked watch manufacturers who duplicate the expen-

sive watches, Omegas, Lucian Picards or any other make. These watches sell at retail for as high as three or four hundred dollars. However, the watches the crooked jewelers turned out had cheese movements inside which would break down in a matter of weeks. Outwardly, they looked like the real thing, with all the insignias on their faces and the twenty-four-karat engraving on the backs.

Teresa told Metrano he could pick up a hundred Omegas and as many Lucien Picards for thirty dollars each. All he needed was the six grand.

"You'll make four or five grand easy on these if you sell them for fifty or sixty bucks each," Teresa said.

Metrano jumped at the deal. He gave Teresa the six grand. Teresa bought the watches at six dollars apiece and pocketed \$4800 profit. He sold Metrano a few other deals and then sprung the big one. He told Metrano he could pick up a truckload of high priced gin for twelve dollars a case, a dollar a bottle. They could make fifty grand on the deal for an investment of twelve grand.

Teresa said, "I'll put in two grand. That's all I've got. Can you put up the rest?"

"Sure," Metrano said. "I'll bring you the money tomorrow."



JOE LOMBARDO

Two days after Metrano delivered the money, Teresa told him the truck had been hijacked. "I'll see if the mob will give us our money back."

Metrano never got his ten grand back because Teresa told him the three guys involved in the deal had been busted by the feds and were in jail.

"Don't worry about it," Teresa told Metrano. "I've got some good deals coming up that will get us all our money back plus a big profit. Just stick with me."

That was gall, and Teresa had mountains of it. The mob never lets go of a sucker until they have bled him dry and Teresa set out to do that with Metrano. When he did, he dropped him.

Up to this point, Teresa had stolen about a quarter of a million dollars since his discharge from the navy and hadn't taken a single bust. He had been involved in the numbers racket, swindles, loan sharking, fenced stolen merchandise, burglaries, robberies, grand larceny. The way he saw it, crime paid a helluva lot better than working like a slob.

He liked the excitement, the thrill of outsmarting suckers and the police. Everyone he knew or grew up with was a thief in some kind of racket. They lived high, wore expensive clothes and played around with good-looking broads who had few morals and abundant taste for nightlife.

Teresa came up with a new scheme sometime in 1957. However, he needed some sharp guys to put it into effect. He contacted Al Judd, an old friend, and three other men from Boston's North End whom he met earlier, Robert Dadieco, Eddie "Whimpy" Bennett and Herbie Serino.

Bennett knew an old-time printer who was an artist in

making duplicates of checks. All this printer needed was a sample check and he could duplicate it within twenty-four hours. He was a genius also at making up copies of state drivers' licenses, necessary for the purpose of identification in cashing checks.

The four went to the printer and told him what they wanted. He made up several lots of checks on various companies. They then got a check-writing machine and a typewriter and put it in the trunk of their car. Wherever they went, they got telephone books so they could select names for use on drivers' licenses for the purpose of identification. They went to different supermarkets, department stores, hardware stores, men's stores, and met at the end of the day.

The average check was for around a hundred and twenty dollars. They cashed a total of more than twenty thousand dollars in checks the first two days. When Massachusetts and Connecticut got too hot, they moved on to New York. Here, they used different checks, on firms in the New York area. In six months, they succeeded in cashing almost a half-million dollars in bad checks. Finally, Teresa's luck ran out.

He had let a small-time hood named Tommy McBrady in the

deal and McBrady was busted when he tried to cash a check. He blew the whistle. The fuzz picked up Teresa. There was too much evidence against him, so he decided to plead guilty. On July 5, 1958, he was sentenced to a term of eighteen months on seven charges of larceny by check. The judge took into consideration the fact that Teresa had a family, so he suspended sentence and put Teresa on probation for two years. That was the end of the check-passing operation.

Teresa needed money. Without money, he was like a man without arms trying to thread a needle. He tied up with a group of bank robbers. These were professionals. They were Chris Mustone, Bob Daddieco, Tommy Richards, John "Red" Kelley, and Billy Agostino. The boss of the team was Agostino. He was one of the shrewdest men at the business of knocking off banks and armored cars, a planner who thought out every phase of a robbery.

He would plan the robbery and the getaway, and the hide-out and disposal of the money, turning it in to a fence for "cool" bills—those had never been stolen. The team, together with Teresa, took four banks, in Brookline, Brighton, Cambridge, and Coolidge Corners. Teresa got out after the fourth

heist because he was certain there would be a bust sooner or later and he would get a long prison term.

#### EVERYTHING-BUT MURDER

ALL IN ALL, Teresa had now been involved in every crime in the book except murder. Unknowingly, he had come to the attention of the big boys in the Organization as a hustler, thief and robber, to them a valuable man to have around. They used him and his talents. Joe Lombardo, boss of New England until he died in 1969 of natural causes, approved of him and passed the word along that Teresa was under his sponsorship.

That should have enough for Teresa, because he was in a position now to make thousands of dollars a week from the various deals given him. However, his lust for gambling and nightlife were monkeys on his back and required thousands a day. He turned to heisting card and crap games. He tied up with some of his former cronies, Bob Daddieco, Chris Mustone, Al Judd, and Herbie Serino.

The games in town floated—that is, they were set up in a different place each time. It wasn't too difficult to learn where the games were to be held. The mob stuck up several

games until they finally hit a game protected by Mike the Wiseguy, underboss to Lombardo, who ordered Teresa picked up and brought to him.

Mike The Wiseguy looked Teresa up and down for about a minute then he exploded. "You sonofabitch, you were given some pretty good things but you had to move out and heist our games. I ought to put you in a box right now. Sit down over there!"

Mike The Wiseguy called Sandy, Teresa's uncle, and told him what Teresa had done. Sandy told him that Teresa had trouble supporting his family, and besides, he was a little crazy in the head. Mike then called Lombardo who told him that Teresa was a good hustler and to let him go.

Mike hung up and turned to Teresa. "I want to tell you something, Mister—if you ever heist another poker or dice game, you're going to end up in a box. Now get the hell outta here!"

It was the last time Teresa stuck up a game. He had seen the light. Mike the Wiseguy meant what he said and Teresa knew it. You could cross someone like him only once.

Next, Teresa got mixed up in phony stocks and bonds. That lasted for one shot, when a smart teller spotted the se-

curities as fakes. He met a couple of guys who dealt in stolen stocks and bonds, lifted from messengers in the Wall Street district. They had mob connections in New York, Miami Beach, Chicago, and Vegas. They were sharp and Teresa knew it after talking with them for two minutes.

They asked him if he could move hot stocks and bonds in the hundreds of thousands. Teresa said he could. His contact for dropping securities, either as loans, using the securities as collateral, or in outright sales, was a builder and contractor named Barney Schwartz, a playboy who went for anything in skirts. That was right up Teresa's alley. He had met Schwartz in London. Teresa ran junkets to London for the Colony Club.

On the way over some of the suckers were taken in card games by Teresa, Jimmy the Greek, Ray Neid and Tony DePietro, all of whom could handle a deck of cards. They were first-class mechanics. Schwartz had placed several hundred thousand dollars worth of stolen bonds for Teresa already. Teresa gave him ten percent of everything he got rid of through his banks and insurance company.

In the next several weeks, Schwartz got rid of \$400,000

worth of stolen securities for Teresa and pocketed forty grand as his commission. Next, Teresa brought him \$200,000 worth of bonds. Instead of taking them to his bank, Schwartz decided to go to Vegas for a vacation. He lost heavily at the tables and then tried to cash the bonds at the casino.

The cashier wouldn't take them. There was a big argument and Schwartz was arrested by local sheriff's deputies. The FBI came into the picture then because the bonds were U.S. securities. The FBI made things hot for Schwartz and he blew the whistle on Teresa. Teresa was arrested and indicted on several counts of transporting \$880,000 in stolen securities as well as on charges of conspiracy.

A high bail was set. Teresa knew he needed the best lawyers he could get, either to beat the rap or to plea-bargain for a lesser charge and sentence. Before the case was finally settled, bail and attorneys fees went over the two hundred thousand dollar figure.

Despite the fact that he faced a trial and prison on the stock deals, Teresa continued to deal in hot securities. He knew no other way he could pick up the money he needed not only to finance his defense but to meet his home and personal ex-

penses, both of which were high. He was desperate now, and desperation will drive a man to do things he never would do under normal circumstances.

He threw caution to the winds and went after anything and everything that would bring in money in heavy amounts. He dealt with many guys in the mobs, with legitimate businessmen who weren't too scrupulous about how they made their money. He was busted again and indicted in Massachusetts and New York on state charges of theft and conspiracy.

He went to trial in April, 1969, on the Federal beef. Schwartz and Al Harrison, Schwartz' front man, testified against Teresa. It looked bad for him. He then made a stupid move. He took the stand to testify in his own behalf. The jury didn't believe him and wasted no time in bringing in a verdict of guilty. Teresa's attorneys then filed an immediate motion for appeal and the court freed Teresa on bail that was set at \$100,000.

He made money on several stock deals but not enough to meet all his expenses. Furthermore, the mobs he dealt with knew he was in a bad way and squeezed him. He dropped the stolen securities for about 50%

less than what he would normally have gotten for them.

On June 30, 1969, Teresa awoke, pulled himself up from the bed and forced himself to a sitting position. The effort took all his strength. He now weighed 325 pounds. His health was bad, mostly because of his obesity and a heart that was acting up. He was also recovering from injuries he sustained when he fell asleep behind the wheel of his car, wrecking it completely. He would have preferred to lie in bed for the rest of the day but anxiety and need for money drove him.

Later that day, two of Teresa's street hustlers came to his office in the Esquire Sportsman's Club and threw down sheets of blank checks from the United Fruit Company and one check with the signature of a properly authorized official of the company. He had Joan Harvey, his secretary, trace the signature several times until she had an almost perfect facsimile. Teresa then made out six checks to as many phony names and registered them in the club files as expenses for junkets and gambling. This was to indicate that the checks were given to the club by the phony names who had rendered them, just in case there was a beef.

Teresa immediately set out to

test the deal. He cashed one check for \$7500 at the State Street Bank and Trust Company in Boston. There was no problem. He then cashed two other checks in two other banks. He was not questioned in either instance. He then ran a check on the United Fruit Company with the bank the company did business with in New York. Theirs, was a revolving account with millions of dollars in it.

So he figured that he would cash one big check just to see how it went. He made it out for \$95,000 and took it to Jerry Meyers, who owned the Boston Boat Sales. Meyers promised to have the cash ready for him and, if that check went through, he would go all the way. He thought, "What the hell is the difference? I'm going to jail for twenty years. How much more time could they give me?"

Several days later, he got into his car to drive to his office. He had gone no more than a block when he heard a screeching of tires and brakes. One car pulled up in front of him, cutting him off, another stopped behind him, a third car pulled up on his left, blocking off any escape from the driver's seat.

"Get out, Teresa!" an agent yelled. "FBI!"

He was pushed against the car and frisked.

"We've got a warrant for your arrest," one of the agents said. "Your bail has been revoked. Let's go."

#### BEHIND BARS

Teresa was taken first to the FBI headquarters in Boston and then to the county jail in Worcester. He was told nothing. He couldn't figure out what had gone wrong and he was in a mild state of shock. His attorney tried to get his \$100,000 bail reinstated but the Boston commissioner of police, Edmund L. McNamara, prevented it. He was like a caged animal suddenly taken from its native habitat. In almost thirty years of crime he had spent only a few days in jail despite 32 arrests.

He was taken before the judge who had suspended his prison sentence and given him probation. The probation was cancelled and the sentence instituted. He was immediately transferred to the Lewisburg Penitentiary. He was no sooner in prison than Joe Black, his partner in the Esquire Sportsman Club, and other ventures, ripped him off.

Black sold all the property they had together including the Club, collected Teresa's end on

a stock deal, took the hundred grand they had in street loan shark money, cleaned out the safety deposit box and walked away with more than \$4,000,000. He then took a boat to Sicily. He's still in hiding there because he's wanted on six separate indictments.

At this writing, Joe Black is hunted by killers in the Boston mobs and by their friends in Sicily, who want to kill him—not only because he turned out to be a fink but because he's got \$4,000,000 they want. Bobby Cardillo, who had been associated with Teresa, also walked away with some \$200,000 of Teresa's money.

Teresa got a lot of bad breaks all at the same time. If Raymond Patriarca and Henry Tameleo hadn't been busted on other raps and gone to prison, Black and Cardillo would never have gotten away with the double-cross. One of Patriarca's rules was that any money any of his men made and invested was protected, no matter how long they remained in prison, and he made sure the families were always taken care of.

Teresa turned sour on the mob because of the double-cross he got from Black and Cardillo. His family was in need and that hurt him.

About six months after he had been in prison, on De-



JOE BLACK

cember 8, 1969, Teresa was visited by two FBI agents who told him he was going to be tried in Boston for his part in the swindle of the Lynn Bank and Trust Company he had pulled together with Ken Smith. That was the time they had arranged for "Tombstone" loans.

Teresa learned that the Massachusetts attorney general's office had broken the case wide open. A state trooper named Richard Schneiderhan and his boss, Dennis Crowley, had convinced one of Teresa's loan shark victims, Jack Hirschfield, to talk, also Ken Smith. The

FBI agents told Teresa they had a tough case against him.

"There's nothing we can do about this, Teresa," one of the agents said. "It's a state case." He then hinted vaguely that, if Teresa would cooperate, they might be able to do something for him.

While he was awaiting trial, Blanche came to court and saw Jack Hirschfeld in a corridor. She went to him and said, "I'm sorry about this. I understand things look bad for you."

Hirschfeld shook his head. "Yeah, things look a little bad for me but not as bad as they do for Vinnie."

"What do you mean?" Blanche asked.

"I'm going to testify against him. I'm going to bury him."

Blanche flamed. "I wouldn't do that if I were you. I don't think Carlo Mastrotoara and some other people would like that. In fact, I'm going to call Carlo as soon as I get home."

Hirschfeld grunted, "Go ahead. But let me tell you something. Carlo is the one who told me to testify—he and Joe Black. They told me to come here and bury Vinnie."

Blanche shook when she heard that. She went to the county jail and told Vinnie what Hirschfeld had said. He was shocked.

He said, "I'm going to play

the same game. I'm going to cross them up. I'm going to plead guilty and ask for a postponement of sentence. Then you call this agent, Jack Kehoe, and tell him to have me shipped to the Pittsfield State Prison. You tell him I'm going to give him all the information he wants, on everybody, right down the line."

"My God, Vinnie, do you know what you're doing?" Blanche asked.

"It's the only way. If I don't do it, they will bury me—deep."

Teresa pleaded guilty, asked for a postponement of sentence, which he got, and then the FBI transferred him to Pittsfield, where he began telling Agents Kehoe and Bill Welby the whole story. They promised him that, in return for his testimony, the Justice Department would provide protection and enough money for him and his family to live on.

They also agreed to get a reduction of sentence from fifteen to five years. That would make him eligible for release on parole in about two years. They also agreed to get all sentences in the state cases suspended if he cooperated with state authorities. He readily agreed.

His testimony resulted in the conviction of twenty-seven top mobsters. There were indictments against twenty-one

others, and he agreed to testify against them. He also agreed to cooperate with Senator John McClellan and his Permanent Senate Subcommittee on Investigations and he testified publicly for them.

Teresa was then transferred to La Tuna, the federal penitentiary near El Paso, Texas, to finish out his jail term under special guard. It was the same place Joe Valachi had been sent after he testified.

Teresa arrived at La Tuna on May 8, 1970, several days after his wife and their children. When Teresa agreed to talk, the FBI snatched Blanche and the kids from their home in North Reading, packed up all their furniture and belongings, stored the furniture and moved Blanche and the kids into a motel. Blanche was nervous all the time. Neither she nor the kids dared leave the motel for fear someone would recognize them.

However, she never mentioned it to her husband. She was given \$700 a month by the government for rent, food and whatever expenses she incurred. An FBI agent called on her every day to make sure she was all right. Jack Kehoe was another agent who did a lot for Blanche and the kids.

Teresa's stay in La Tuna was miserable. The area is hot and

dry. He was placed near the prison hospital in what is known as a strip cell. There was nothing in it except a cot and a toilet bowl. The prisoners were mostly Mexican and Indian, as were the guards. However, they were very cordial to him. Teresa complained about the cell to Jack Kehoe, who had him transferred to another cell, where there was a television set, a desk and chair.

Several weeks later, Teresa was taken to Washington to appear before the McClellan rackets committee. Within twenty-four hours, his huge figure and heavily jowled face, his gravel voice, became as familiar to millions of Americans, as Joe Valachi's. It destroyed whatever anonymity he had hoped for and terrific heat was turned on him.

Now, not only would the mob be looking for him, but legitimate citizens, who hoped to reap some sort of financial reward by turning him in to a mob figure, would be his enemies. A Boston newspaper, for some reason or other, revealed that Blanche was now living under her maiden name of Besselman, a clue the mob would have paid thousands to learn. Whoever wrote that story must have been drunk. Teresa began to wonder if crime did pay after all.

He was subjecting his family to the most terrifying moments a woman and children could know, fear of assassination, harsh, brutal and final. He asked himself, if he had it to do all over again, wouldn't he have done it differently. He could have made it legitimately, big, because he had brains, was an organizer, a doer, a born leader with the knack for making big money.

He looked back at the whole texture and pattern of his life and saw now how really empty it had been—how little time he had spent with his family, with a wife who loved him and whom he could trust implicitly, and the kids. Regret washed over him like scalding water in a hot shower.

Now it was too late, too late to pick up the pieces, for the very simple reason that there were no pieces to pick up. He had been a bum, and now he would be a bum on the run for the rest of his life.. And what of Blanche and the kids?

David, Teresa's son, and Cindy, his daughter, became compulsive eaters because of their nerves. They both got as big as houses. They couldn't live like normal kids. They were fearful, ran home from school as fast as they could, rushed into the house and slammed the door, hurried to a window and looked

out to make sure no one had followed them.

If they were a few minutes late coming home from school Blanche would get hysterical, jump in the car and go looking for them. Wayne, the oldest of the three children, gave Blanche gray hairs. He moved about freely. He was a big boy and figured he could take care of himself. Teresa tried to tell him no one could protect himself from the mob, no matter how big or how tough. But Wayne wouldn't listen. He said he wasn't going to become a prisoner, and to hell with the mob.

Each time Teresa came to the Superior Court Building in Boston for a grand jury appearance or for interviews by police agencies, hit men were in the vicinity, watching, taking down license numbers of cars. Teresa recognized two of them.

One was Barney Villani, a little punk whose life Teresa said he had once saved. The other was a hulking bank robber and hit man for the Organization named Tommy Rossi. FBI agents picked them up and questioned them but, since they had nothing on them, had to release them. When Teresa left the courtroom he was surrounded by an army of FBI agents and federal marshals.

Teresa also learned that the

mob had put a \$500,000 price tag on his head.

"How about it?" he was asked by an agent. "Do you think it's true?"

"Probably," Teresa answered. "But anyone who would hit me would never live to collect. These big-figure contracts is propaganda for the street punks. In that way every small-time hood is out on the street looking for me in order to make the score. What they don't know is that, once they turn me in, not only will they get hit but so will the guy who hits me. The mob leaves no room for any margin of error."

It's been almost three years since Vincent Charles Teresa

has been out of jail. He hasn't been free for a single minute. Sometimes he moves around by himself in full disguise, away from his family, sometimes with them, and sometimes the kids are with friends or members of the family, but only for short periods of time. It will always be like that, because the mob never forgets, and all the friends of those Teresa testified against and put in jail hope to find him and take vengeance.

"The moving finger writes and having writ moves on, and not a single word of piety..." And that's what Vincent Charles Teresa wrote for himself and his family—a dead run into oblivion, sooner or later.



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Coming soon—

**Another Incredible TRUE CRIME MAFIA Masterpiece**  
**THE SHOOTING OF SAM GIANCANNO**

**By DAVID MAZROFF**

*There are few Mafia murder mysteries. When the mob hits a victim, the killer is known—at least to the Organization. But the recent murder of Sam Giancanno does not fit any of the usual patterns. Sam was shot at home with a .22-caliber pistol, too small for mob usage, and \$1400 on him.*

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# THE EMBALMING ROOM



by

**EDWIN P.  
HICKS**

BIG JOE CHAVISKI, retired Chief of Detectives, Fort Sanders, Arkansas, Police Department, had been suffering pains from indigestion recently. Indigestion, or his heart. He knew he should see a doctor, but if there was one rule he had followed all through his adult years it was to stay away from doctors. Doctors can scare the hell out

*Private Boley never got to be a hero. He died twice stateside, before he got a chance to see any real action abroad.*

of you, and when a fellow weighs over 255 pounds and is getting up in years it's an open invitation to any doctor he sees to put him on a strict diet.

Joe Chaviski didn't want a diet—any diet. It was the middle of the night. He had awakened hungry and finished off a quart of vanilla ice cream. So what? So vanilla ice cream was his favorite food. It gave him a lift. He had devoured vanilla ice cream with a passion ever since the first spending money he had earned in childhood. Eating what he wanted, whenever he wanted, and as much as he wanted, was part of the good life as far as he was concerned.

Nevertheless that recurring indigestion did bring wrinkles to his round face when the pain was severe and brought worried thoughts he had never had before when he considered he was in no sense a young man anymore.

Tonight, because he was harassed by depressing thoughts, Chaviski dug out the old family Bible from beneath a table in his bedroom, wiped off a quarter inch of dust, carried it over to his soft TV chair, preparing to do some reading for the good of his soul—and opened the Holy Book at a cardboard marker. Turning the marker over he read:

BE SURE THY SIN  
WILL FIND THEE OUT.

Chaviski grinned. The warning was printed in ornate Old English type arranged to fit the ten by eight inch cardboard nicely.

The old placard took him back to his boyhood. It had been tacked up on the side of the kitchen cabinet, just to the left of the window through which he looked out when he was doing the family dishes in the sink. He had been so small he had to stand on a box to reach the dishes.

On the other side of the window was another ornate placard, which had been given him as an attendance prize for going to Sunday school three straight months without an absence. Painted red roses adorned this placard on which was printed:

LOVE MUST BE SHARED. HAPPINESS IS BORN A TWIN.

As a child Joe Chaviski had not understood the latter saying and of course didn't agree with the sentiment at all. Hence this card had disappeared many years ago, unlike the one that warned about sin finding you out. He understood this sign perfectly. Somehow his boyhood sins, such as smok-

ing real tobacco cigarettes, playing hookey from school, stealing apples, had always "found him out."

His buttocks had born witness to the truth of the motto many times—so Chaviski had kept the placard even through his married years, his naval service—and, now that his beloved wife Lucy had been dead more years than he wished to remember, the message was still a part of his living code.

He found a spot on the wall of his bathroom, near the mirror, and tacked it up. Then he returned to his chair, stretched his sock feet out to the warmth of the fireplace—and suddenly time slipped back to another such cold night when the Cuban missile threat was at its height and a division of crack troops from the state of Kentucky had been called into active service and was in training at nearby Fort Chaffee.

Crack troops they were—clean and efficient. But in every sizeable group of men, regardless of everything else, there were bound to be some scoundrels. Chaviski had been a detective in those days and was working with the night force.

Three inches of fresh snow had fallen on an earlier coating of ice on this certain night, and the snow was still coming

down. The wind whipped off the river and straight down Garrison Avenue. Joe Chaviski, coming out of the Broadway Grill, pulled the collar of his overcoat up around his bull neck and made his way gingerly to his car. It was exactly half-past midnight.

A police cruiser pulled alongside and Sam McKinney, a hard-boiled Military Police sergeant with the Kentucky division, rolled down the front window six inches and shouted to Chaviski. "We got one, fellow. A soldier dead, down under the bridge."

"Okay, I'll follow you," Chaviski shouted back. All thought of the cold suddenly was out of his mind.

Bert Haney, a plainclothesman, was at the wheel of the car in which Sergeant McKinney was riding. While the division was in training at Chaffee, MPs in some instances were paired with the city police nights, when hundreds of homesick GIs were roaming Fort Sanders streets.

It was a repetition of World War II, when armored divisions were stationed at Chaffee and soldiers swarmed all over the town seven nights a week and on Sunday. Fort Sanders, which came into being as a military post on the Arkansas River early in the nineteenth cen-

tury, had come into its own again as an "army town."

A couple of tramps, gathering firewood beneath the Garrison Avenue Free Bridge, had found the body of the soldier, lying face down upon the frozen sand and near the water's edge.

The soldier's head had been bashed in from behind apparently with a rock, which without doubt then had been tossed into the river.

"I don't know this guy," said Sergeant McKinney. "Probably from E Company. They've got a lot of new men in the last month. Somebody's rolled him. Wallet's gone."

Briefly, the officers played their flashlights over the scene and found nothing else—just the body of the soldier who had come to the end of the trail in the frozen sand beneath the bridge.

"I went on duty at midnight," said Sergeant McKinney. "You got any of our guys in jail?"

"Two or three drunks," said Chaviski. "One of them was bunged up pretty good in a fight. There was a hijacking at the Ace Liquor store out on Midland Boulevard about ten-forty-five. The hijacker was in uniform. Got a couple of hundred dollars. We picked up two soldiers, but they came clean. The salesman couldn't identify them."

Parked on the concrete slab beneath the bridge approach and across from the old Frisco station was a car reported stolen earlier in the night. The owner had gone into a drugstore on Rogers Avenue, leaving the keys in the car. When he came out, the car was gone. It had very likely been used by the hijackers, and the dead soldier probably had been one of them.

Back at the police station Private Carl Shadduck was cold sober now, but he was a distressing sight. He was a slightly built little man, and he smelled of liquor and vomit. Both eyes were blackened, and his nose was swollen to twice its normal size.

"He was a big guy," Shadduck said, grinning sheepishly between cut lips. "Stranger to me. Probably one of the new men from E Company. I got the hell knocked out of me. They docketed me for drunk and fighting, but I wasn't drunk. I just hadn't got my sense back when they brought me to jail. He had knocked me out."

"Where were you fighting? Down under the bridge?" said McKinney.

"Don't try to put the big britches on me, Sarge," said Private Shadduck. "It was down at the Garrison Restaurant in the four-hundred block. I had

this girl. Just a pick-up. Never seen her before. We were drinking beer, not bothering nobody. We wasn't drunk, and she wasn't either. Name's Sally. That's all I know.

"This big guy from E Company had just walked in. He set down at a table and began looking at my girl. He drank a bottle of beer, and then he come over to our booth and without asking me or her sat right down in the same seat with Sally.

"Now I'm a little man, but I ain't going to stand for nothin' like that. I told him to get lost, and he laughed and put his arm around my gal. I grabbed a beer bottle, aiming to slug him, but this guy is a lot faster than he looks and he hit me first. The next thing I knew the MPs was hauling us to jail.

"The guy who hit me? He wasn't drunk. He was just trying to take my girl from me. They charged him with fighting and locked him up, and they threw me in the runaround and put a charge of drunk and fighting both on me. Look, I ain't got nothing against the other guy. It was just a fight over a floozy."

McKinney nodded. "Okay, Private."

"Look," said Shadduck. "How about getting me out of here?"

"Later," said McKinney.



PRIVATE NED JERNIGAN, E Company, grinned. "The little guy started for me with a bottle, and I coldcocked him," Jernigan said. "I'm pretty good with my fists. He got sore because he thought I was going to take his gal. Been with her two weeks ago, my first trip to town. Everybody in the restaurant saw him go for me with a beer bottle.

"I had to hit him. I hated to, because he was just a little squirt, but I ain't letting no man go for me with a beer bot-

tle. I'd had just one glass of beer myself. Wasn't drunk or nothing. They didn't dock me for drunk. Just wanted to be civil to the girl. You can ask her. Name's Sally Copeland. Lives at the St. Charles hotel. He started for me with the bottle. I had to let him have it. What else could I do?"

"How long you been at Fort Chaffee?" Joe Chaviski asked.

"Six weeks. Transferred here from Fort Hood."

"How you rate being in town this late at night?"

"I pulled a weekend pass, Sarge. The jailer's got it with my things. I ain't no rookie. I know how to get around. The army's my home."

"How long you been in the army?" McKinney asked.

"Eight years."

"And still a private?"

"Now, Sarge, you know how it is. I been up and down all the way a couple of times. I'm married to the army, but I like to have my fun."

Checking at the desk, they found Jernigan had been telling the truth about the pass. He also had better than two-hundred-fifteen dollars in cash, including a small amount of silver. Private Shadduck had one-hundred-ninety dollars.

"Too much money this time of the month," said Sergeant McKinney. "That ain't right.

We got paid ten days ago. These guys are crumb buns. There's some in every outfit. They would have lost it in a crap game by now."

"Maybe that's where they got it," said Chaviski.

"Yeah, but I doubt it."

"Okay," said Chaviski. "We still got to get an identity on the body at the funeral home. Haney you go get the clerk at the liquor store that was robbed. Sarge and I will take Jernigan out to have a look at the body. Being from the same company he'll probably know who he is."

When Private Jernigan took one look at the body lying on a slab in the embalming room at City Mortuary he nodded his head. "Guy's name is Will Boley. My own company. Come up from Fort Hood. Tough guy. Always drinking and fighting. Gets in trouble every time he hits town."

McKinney wrote the dead soldier's name down in his note pad and gave a copy of it to Curley Waters, one of the embalmers.

Waters was hungry. "You fellows going to be here for a while? If so, Henry and me would like to slip down to the Grill and get a bite to eat. We've been busy as the devil all night and haven't had anything to eat yet."

"Yeah," Joe Chaviski said. "Go right ahead. We got a call in for the coroner, and we got a car bringing the fellow who was hijacked to see if he can identify the body as the hijacker. We'll hang around until you get back."

"Make yourself at home," said Waters. "Come on Henry. Let's get going." At the door he turned back. "We'll take the pick-up buggy, and if you get any calls for us, please get the name and phone number and call us at the Broadway Grill."

"Will do," said Chaviski.

Sergeant McKinney lit a cigarette. "There isn't nothing quite as bright and ghastly as a danged embalming room at night," he said.

Joe Chaviski picked up an issue of *Casket and Sunnyside* magazine which he found on the small instrument table, sat down in one of the two chairs in the room and began turning the pages.

"You can always find a more restful place in one of the slumber rooms, Sarge."

McKinney swore. "You don't catch me getting into any of those side rooms. Not this time of night. Probably a body in each of them. Didn't you hear Waters say they had been awfully busy tonight?"

"Suit yourself," said Chaviski. "What you got against

bodies, anyway? I thought you might want to go in one of the rooms and stretch out. But then I guess you prefer to stay in here with *that*." He pointed to the corpse of Private Boley.

Chaviski hid his grin behind the copy of the magazine. Sergeant McKinney was supposed to be hard boiled like all Military Police—or going back to his own navy experience—Shore Patrol. But the tough sergeant was coming unglued because he was in a mortuary.

"Say, fella," said Private Jernigan, "I identified the body. I don't like it here anymore than Sarge. Can't we get out of here?"

"Nope. Not until Haney shows up with the liquor salesman," said Chaviski. "What's the matter with you army boys? Why you so scared about hanging around a funeral home?"

Jernigan mumbled an oath under his breath, then subsided.

In a few minutes Bert Haney came in with Jim Roberts, the liquor store salesman who had been held up.

Roberts looked at the body and nodded. "That's the man," he said. "I'll never forget that face. He scared me half to death. I thought he was going to blow my head off."

"The poor guy learned a les-

son the hard way—that crime does not pay," said Chaviski, with macabre humor. "His buddy must have killed him and got all the money."

"I just saw this one man," said Roberts.

"Sure," said Chaviski. "The other fellow drove the car."

McKinney took out his notebook again and started writing.

A gasp came from Jernigan. His eyes stared past the others.

"What's eating you?" said Joe.

"Oh, my God!" said Jernigan.

All four turned. *The corpse of Private Boley was sitting up on the white slab!* The fingers of one of his hands which had been placed upon his chest, were extended—pointing straight out towards Private Jernigan.

"No, no, Boley!" Jernigan moaned. His knees buckled. "I'm sorry, Boley! I didn't mean to kill you! You were holding out on me!"

Chaviski and McKinney reached for the kneeling, terror-stricken Jernigan. They snapped the cuffs on his wrists.

"Quick! Get him out of here and lock him up!" Chaviski said to Haney. "I'll stay here until the coroner arrives and the boys get back from the restaurant. Docket him for investigation of murder."

Jernigan was still whimpering as Haney and Sergeant McKinney led him away.

JOE CHAVISKI stirred, pulled on his bedroom slippers, trundled into the kitchen and made a pot of coffee. When the coffee had perked sufficiently, he poured a steaming cup, returned to the living room, stood before the fireplace and sipped the brew. Between sips, his mouth turned up at the corners. His round eyes twinkled.

His mind was still back at that night years before when the corpse of Private Boley sat up on the embalming slab, frightening Jernigan half to death. After the others left the mortuary, Chaviski, who was considered by his fellow officers on the force to be a brave man, and who had faced death numerous times in line of duty, now performed what he always thereafter considered the one greatest feat of bravery in his entire life.

He stepped over to the sitting corpse and placed his ear against its chest. There was no heartbeat, and the body already was cold—cold as the outdoors that frigid night. He felt for a pulse. There was none, and the wrist already was hard and clammy. Private Boley was dead. There was no question about that!

He went to the telephone and called the Grill, where the embalming duo were finishing their meal. The boys were back within five minutes. They kidded Chaviski when they saw the corpse of Boley sitting upright, sightless eyes glaring straight ahead. He didn't give a hang how much they-kidded him. He was glad they were back.

The explanation Waters gave him of the corpse that sat up was simple. The night was unusually cold. Rigor mortis had set in. Once in a thousand times, perhaps, rigor mortis would cause the muscles in a dead body to act as they had with Boley. The morticians began working to straighten the body, and Chaviski hurried from the place. He was glad to get out of there! If the coroner wanted him, he knew where to easily find him—at the police station.

At the station, Private Jernigan was still whimpering—a broken man. He and Boley had robbed the liquor store with Jernigan remaining in the stolen car, which they later hid beneath the bridge. Then, on the river bank, where he and Boley were dividing the money, they had quarreled. He had

knocked Boley unconscious with his fist and then battered his head in with a piece of concrete that had broken off from the old bit of pavement under the bridge.

He had then robbed the corpse and hurried the four blocks from the bridge to the Garrison Café, where he had deliberately picked a fight to frame up a partial alibi for his activities that night. However, the two tramps hunting firewood had stumbled onto Boley's body minutes after Jernigan left, had phoned police from the Frisco freight office, and things then had happened as they had happened.

The corpse that had sat up was simply a coincidence—an unnerving coincidence as far as Jernigan was concerned—a once-in-a-thousand happening caused by a peculiar combination of things and timed perfectly to bring the murderer of Boley to justice. Or was it merely a coincidence? Chaviski believed differently.

Now he went into the bathroom, after drinking his coffee, squinted at the old placard on the wall. "Be Sure Your Sin Will Find You Out," Joe Chaviski grunted. He turned off the light and went back to bed.



# UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES

by ROBERT H. CURTIS

*A frame is a frame is a frame no matter how you slice it. But sometimes a good frame can determine an election either way.*

I WAS sipping a cup of coffee and happily reading about the murder of Monk "The Sponge" Lucas in the *Morning Gazette*. The police had no leads and District Attorney Hines offered his usual "no comment." Ordinarily, I am unhappy to learn of someone's death but Monk "The Sponge" was not a very nice guy. Before he met his untimely demise, he had been a hit man known for his compulsive neatness. He was reputed

to carry a sponge to clean up any mess he made in the course of his official duties, and indeed the *Gazette* reported that when Monk was discovered under pier 39 stabbed in eight places, the right rear pocket of his pants contained a sponge.

I looked at my watch. It was 6:45 a.m. and reading that Monk had been at the receiving end of a contract got my day off to a good start. After all, I am a private detective and love justice, especially poetic justice. I was savoring the details of how Monk was found, along with other flotsam and jetsam, on the sandy shores under the pier when the telephone spoiled my fun. The call was from a new client. I was familiar with his eminent name although I had never met him. Rich and prominent citizens rarely phone me.

"It's about Drake," the voice said. "The election is two weeks off and that grafter and his political machine are going to stay in power unless something is done. I've learned that you're a man of action and that you dislike Drake. Therefore, I'm hiring you to find out something which will remove Drake from the political picture."

"If you can come up with some hard evidence—and we both know that Drake has plenty of skeletons in his cruddy closet—I can use my influence

to get the papers to print what you dig up. District Attorney Hines hasn't been successful. You can do better. For once, the voters will see that the papers have been right all along."

The conversation continued for another few minutes and, when it was finished, I realized that my client was a philanthropist in the most classical meaning of the word. Of course, he was slightly inaccurate, I didn't dislike Louis Drake—I merely hated his guts. I had been a Drake-watcher for years and had learned a lot about him. He is a loner and, like me, a bachelor.

Now and then I would see him in a restaurant. He was powerfully built but his face was thin and retained a ratlike appearance despite his gluttony. He had a penchant for underage blondes and considered himself dapper. I thought his hats, his pearl stickpin and his highly polished shoes made him look just like the grafter he was.

My client was correct in one thing he said. The newspapers had tried over the years to get rid of Drake but their editorials had never been effective. Well financed P.R. campaigns often distort truth, especially in Drake's case. My client told me that words were not enough. The sticks and stones of facts

were what was needed for Drake. That was my job.

The last thing he said to me was not to bother him or contact him. Just to do the best job I could. He had confidence in me. I'm glad he had confidence because, while I liked the idea of getting rid of a hack politico like Drake, the job seemed impossible with the election only two weeks off.

Suddenly my eyes glanced down to the paper and from the hazy, poor-quality photograph of Monk's body surrounded by three policemen, a crazy and bold idea crystallized. It might just work. I looked at my watch again. I didn't have too much time, knowing the routine in the city morgue as I did. Monk "The Sponge" would serve a second useful function. His first was dying.

I reached the morgue at 9:15 a.m. and was relieved to see Dr. Delgado well into the autopsy of Monk "The Sponge." My blue contact lenses, my moustache, my neatly pasted-on professional beard, my wig and my small but closed instrument bag practically spelled out "Dr. Frank Silver," Monk's personal physician. It was as if Delgado expected me, as Monk's doctor, to show up at the autopsy for a few minutes to see how poor old Monk bought it.

Dr. Delgado almost got me

when he asked about the aortic stenosis. My answer, "Oh, we knew all about *that*," seemed to satisfy him. When he left for a second, I appeared very interested in Monk's abdominal cavity. Actually, I looked among the clots for some liquid blood, which I scooped up into a heparinized glass tube, corking the tube quickly. I had already commented about the terrible gashes adorning Monk's torso.

"Lousy butchers," I said. "They must have used a four-inch blade."

"Six inches is more like it," Dr. Delgado answered.

I left as quickly as I could. I didn't want any more medical questions. By now, it was 10:40 a.m. Things were going better than I expected but I realized that the most risky part of my job was coming up.

I raced home from the morgue, tightly gripping my instrument bag, now heavier by one tube of blood protected by cotton. I was inside my basement apartment ten minutes later. I live there for two reasons. First, I don't particularly like stairs or elevators. Secondly, I can come and go unobserved, which obviously is important in my profession. I changed into a maintenance man's uniform and transferred the cotton-wrapped tube of blood into a tool-kit, to which I

added a magnifying glass and some other equipment.

When I reached the vicinity of Drake's apartment building, complete with its awning and doorman, I walked into a phone booth and deposited a coin. I called Drake's home number, which had been provided to me by my client, and was content after seven rings that Drake was busy at City Hall, performing his usual function of defrauding our city.

Casually, I walked into the service side entrance of the building. I had counted on the fact that Drake would not live in a place with overly tight security since his underworld cronies on their way to make a deal would not want to be seen. I worried a bit as the service elevator climbed to the ninth floor but was relieved by what I found. Drake was not as wily as I thought. I entered his apartment with ease, using only a plastic credit card. The equipment I had brought to take care of a dead-bolt situation was not needed.

The apartment gave me a spooky feeling, and not merely because it was deserted. It was simply that its contents so faithfully reflected its owner. Everything was "correct" but I expect that the only thing possibly warm about the apartment was the hot water. No

photographs, no mementoes, not the slightest deference to sentimentality. There had been more life in the morgue that morning.

I began systematically to inspect the apartment. The service entrance had led me into a kitchen which was connected by a hall to a pantry and then to large room which served as living room and dining room. At the far end of this living room, a short hall led to the master bedroom, which contained a massive desk, bed, bureau and, most impressive of all, a huge walk-in closet.

I was looking through the closet when the noise of a large man walking made my heart stop. At least I thought it had stopped although it couldn't have because in a second or so I realized that my pulse was racing. Funny how the unexpected arrival of a man like Drake can upset the professional attitude of an ordinary working detective. Luckily, I had turned on no lights and I was in the closet when Drake entered.

I had left the closet door slightly open and I could see his bulky frame sitting at his desk. He was absorbed in looking through a notebook. I literally held my breath and the times when I had to let it out, I muffled the sound in the sleeve of one of Drake's suits. Finally,

Drake got up from his desk and my pulse raced even faster. He was heading towards the closet and me.

Suddenly, he stopped at the bed to pick up his hat. For a moment, he looked quizzically at the partially opened closet door but apparently something else was on his mind because he put his hat on his head and left, slamming the front door.

I began to breathe again. Had Drake opened that closet, he wouldn't have wondered too long about what a maintenance man with unusual "tools" was doing in an area that required no repairs. He probably would have tried to kill me for being a burglar and, of course, technically he would have had a point. I don't know who would have won the fight but if Drake had iced me, even District Attorney Hines would have agreed that Louis was within his rights in knocking off a burglar armed with a knife. For a six-inch blade was in my tool kit.

My client had said that I was a man of action but for a brief moment, the only action I thought of was running like hell to the service elevator and disappearing. However, my professionalism, along with my feelings about Drake, combined to rule out caution in favor of what I like to think of as virtue. I decided to proceed with

my plan, assuring myself that Drake would not return.

I got to work right where I was, the walk-in closet. One thing about Drake—while I didn't like the way he dressed, his tailor must have been happy. There were over seventy suits lined up on the two bars of the closet. I also picked up a pair of black shoes from the neatly arranged rows of thirty or so pairs, each one shined and stretched by shoe trees. I picked a pair with slightly worn heels.

Now I opened my tool kit and removed the tube of blood. I salted the blue suit with a few drops of Monk's precious liquid and then recorked the tube. Next, I reached into the kit and took out a bottle of sand and river water from pier 39 and sprinkled the shoes with a little of its mixed contents. I replaced the shoes and walked out of the closet.

Next, I went to the desk. I opened one of the side drawers and inserted a typed note from Monk to Drake warning Drake to pay up and soon. The signature was a simple typed M.L. I had one last job to perform in the bedroom. I went to Drake's bureau and began to search it. Finally, in the bottom drawer, I found what I was looking for. I was nervous and didn't relish the time I had to spend, but it was important.

I located the jewelry box containing Drake's collection of stickpins. Most were pearl, but I found one which was monogrammed. From my kit, I took out a magnifying glass and a flashlight. I made certain that the stickpin had the jeweler's marks on it. Then I placed it in the pocket of my uniform and proceeded to finish my job.

I went to the living room and sprinkled most of the blood onto the dark carpet. It was practically invisible, so I added a nice touch. I took some carpet stain remover from the kit and wiped a few of the spots clean, leaving light areas. Now I moved to the kitchen to complete my final task. There was no need to use the knife I had brought. Two kitchen drawers were filled with assorted knives and I used a tape measure to select one of them. I poured the remaining blood over the knife and then wiped it clean but not too clean. Then I said good-bye to Drake's domicile.

The fresh air felt wonderful as I walked briskly eastward to the next avenue. There I hopped on a bus. I was back in my apartment by 2:10 p.m. in plenty of time to change from professional maintenance man to wino. Of course, I didn't begin to stagger until I was a few hundred feet from the pawnshop I had selected. The

owner, I had heard, was in trouble with the police—exactly what I needed. I entered the shop clutching the stickpin, into which I had vigorously rubbed sand, especially into the small oval space surrounding the initials L.D.

"Hey, mister," I began. "How much for this valuable—" I struggled drunkenly over this word—"gold jewelry." Then I laughed and laughed. "I found it under pier thirty-nine and it's going to buy me lots of wine. That's a poem. I made that poem up just now when I came from pier thirty-nine." I hoped to impress the location on the pawnshop owner. Apparently, I failed.

The man took the stickpin in his hand, commenting that he didn't think it was worth very much. He looked it over quickly and told me he could give me two dollars for it. I had come to the right place. The stickpin was worth at least sixty dollars. The owner now picked up a loupe and began to examine the ornament, more for his own benefit than for mine. He had already discounted me. Suddenly his expression changed from feigned boredom to something else. I was hoping that the sand had piqued his interest. It had.

"Where did you say you found this?"

"Pier thirty-nine. This morn-

ing, right under good ole' pier thirty-nine."

The pawnbroker hesitated, weighing the conflict between a good deal and possible loss of his store license for withholding evidence. He decided in favor of the latter.

"Pier thirty-nine, huh? That's where the gangster was found. This will have to go to the cops. If everything's okay they'll return it to me. Here's a ticket, but I won't pay you until the cops clear it."

"Please, mister," my eyes were actually watering. "Just a little something on account. I haven't eaten since yesterday."

The pawnshop owner hesitated, then handed me a dollar.

By 3:50 p.m., the job was almost finished. The pawnshop exchange had gone well, but I wanted some insurance. I telephoned the police department from a pay phone, representing myself as an outraged anonymous "associate" of Monk. I told the Chief that even though poor Monk had been fighting about money with Drake, there was no excuse for Drake to have knifed my friend in the back. Yes, I had gotten the word from a "reliable" source that Drake had done the job personally after luring Monk to his apartment with a promise of payment.

"Don't believe me, Chief, get

Drake—or, better still, search his place."

Now I had done all I could. I read for a few hours but I was completely exhausted. Any news about the success or failure of my plan would have to wait until morning. I decided to skip supper and set my alarm for 6:30 a.m. Then I went to sleep.

This morning, I am sipping coffee again. I was helped by yesterday's story about Monk, but this morning I am fully satisfied as I read and reread the *Gazette*. DRAKE ACCUSED OF MURDER, the headline shouts, and the story goes on to say that a police department spokesman revealed that the authorities have a strong case against Drake. There are vague statements about evidence discovered in Drake's apartment as well as about something that turned up yesterday in a local pawnshop.

The article ends with an almost superfluous item—"Drake has announced that, under the circumstances, he is withdrawing from the election in order to devote time in proving that he had nothing to do with Monk's murder." That one little sentence is, after all, the justification for the fee I will receive.

Tomorrow, I will put on a pair of gloves and mail an explanation of the entire incident

to the Chief of police. It will be typed on the same old typewriter on which I typed the note to Drake from M.L. Included with my letter of explanation will be a photostat of the note to Drake, the pawn ticket, and the empty tube of blood.

That, of course, will clear Drake of the Murder One

charge, but he's in for a lot of trouble from all the fallout. Although he will be very angry about the method I used to put Drake out of circulation, deep down, my client, the brilliant Assistant District Attorney Alan Berman, will be pleased by the public service he indirectly performed.

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●

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DECEMBER, 1975

# Come To My Murder

*Steve Weston arrived at the swank resort restaurant in time to see his beautiful client shoot her fiance dead at his table. But this turned out to be one of those deceptive cases when seeing cannot be believed and nothing is the way it looks.*

by PETER GERMANO



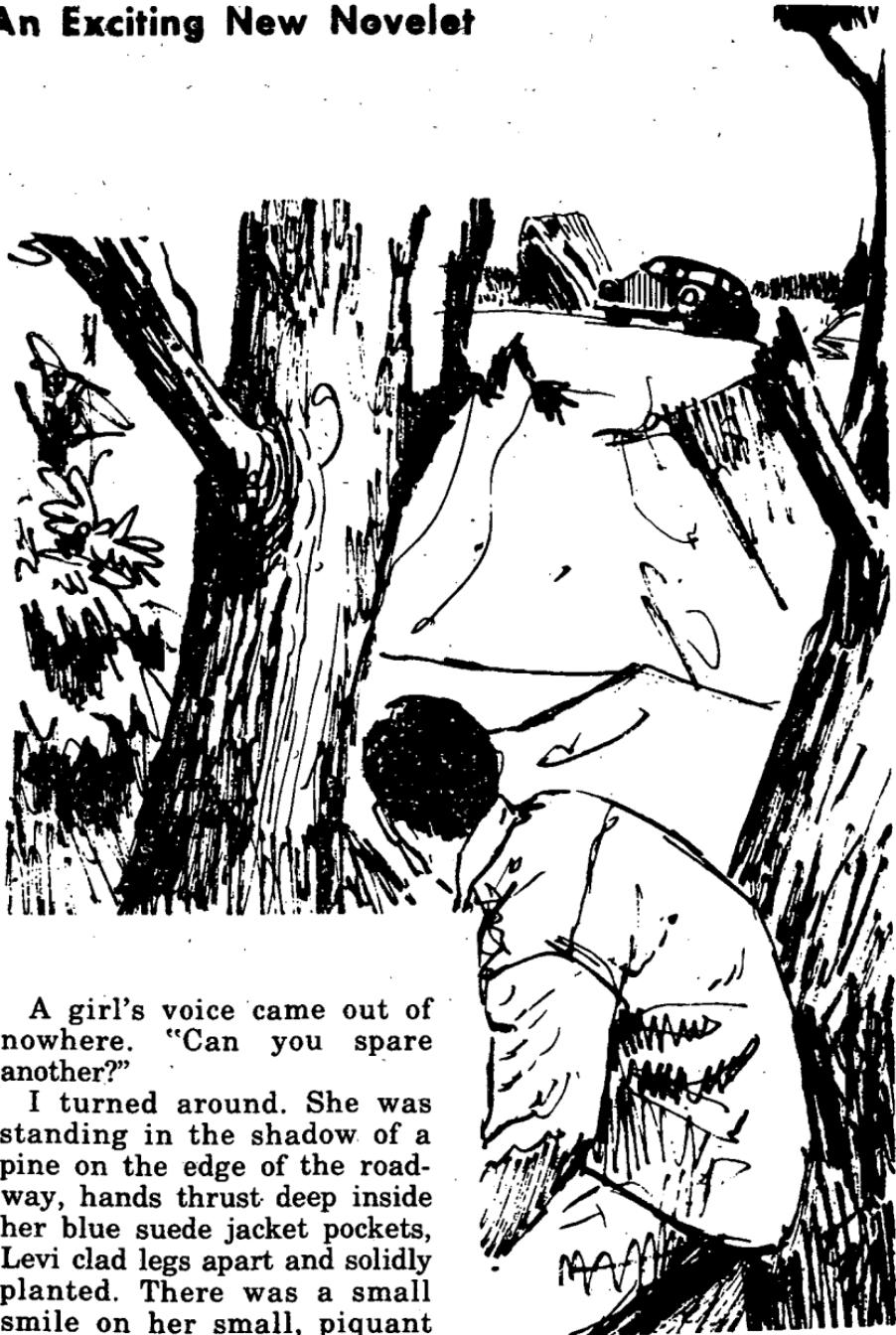
"GO AHEAD," my boss said. "Take a ride up to Wetherton and see what's bothering Vivian Wilson. I'll collect a fat fee from Johnson. He's still in love with her, the sucker!"

Which explains why I was changing a flat on one of those winding hill roads in the Adirondacks, a little northwest of Lake Placid. I was to meet Miss Wilson, ex-wife of "Tubby" Johnson, millionaire playboy, and find out who and why someone wanted to kill her. Not that I was particularly interested in seeing Vivian again, but a job is a job and a private

dick takes orders, just like anyone else who works for a living.

I tightened the last lug, kicked the tire twice for good measure and unkinked my aching back. I guess I should have been thankful I had gas. The October dusk was crisp and dry, graying the flaming panorama of second growth oak and cedar and maple that fell off to the valley on my right. I put my tools away in the trunk, closed it, and walked around the car to the door I had left open. I reached for the pack of cigarettes on the front seat and shoved a butt in my mouth.

## An Exciting New Novelet



A girl's voice came out of nowhere. "Can you spare another?"

I turned around. She was standing in the shadow of a pine on the edge of the roadway, hands thrust deep inside her blue suede jacket pockets, Levi clad legs apart and solidly planted. There was a small smile on her small, piquant

face. She was about five feet four, nicely rounded, and the crisp autumn air had put natural color in her cheeks. One of those yellow silk scarves that women use for a dozen purposes kept her warm brown hair from blowing all over her face. She looked smartly casual, a trick most women want to achieve and few do.

I held out the pack and she came up and took one. I held my lighter for her and she said, "Thank you," in a soft, casual voice. Then, "You did a nice job with that tire," she added, nodding toward my rear wheel. "I've got a blowout just like it."

I glanced up the road, but there was no car in sight. She saw my look and said, "Oh, it's up around the bend. I have no spare," She sounded almost cheerful.

"That's nice," I growled. "What do you expect me to do, make one for you?"

"You could give me a lift to Wetherton," she suggested. "I'll send a mechanic back to make the change."

"All right," I nodded. "Hop in. I'm an hour late already, but anything to help out a lady in distress."

She slid in and I closed the door. Then I remembered something. I put my hands on the sill and looked in at her.

"Two cars passed me while I

was changing tires. Why did you pick me?"

She shrugged. "Guess the natives are wary of strange women on the highways. Besides, I liked your face."

I let it go at that. I drove up to her car, a battered gray Volkswagon, a quarter of a mile ahead. I stopped and waited while she got out and rummaged inside for a trim, gray plastic suitcase with the initials V.J. etched in gold under the handle.

I took it from her and put it on the back seat of the Buick. When I slid back under the wheel I found her staring at me. Her gaze was a little startled.

"What's the matter now?" I said.

She pointed a finger at my breast pocket and I knew she must have seen the gun in my underarm holster when I leaned over.

She finally got it out. "Fuzz?"

"Yeah, Private cop, up from New York. I'm driving in to Wetherton."

She relaxed at that. I gunned away from the Volks. I waited for her to make conversation, but after a while I got tired of waiting and picked it up myself. I nodded toward her suitcase in back and said, "What's the VJ stand for—Volkswagen Jennie?"

She smiled at that. "Believe it or not," she answered, "they stand for Verity Jones. That's me. My mother was determined she'd have one Jones that would stand out," she added.

"You'd stand out anywhere, anyhow," I said. Then, "Just to even things, I'm Steve Weston. My folks were Vermont farmers, and I was one Weston too many. When they died my brothers split the land, gave me two hundred dollars and a ticket to New York. Off and on, I've lived on the East Side of Manhattan for ten years."

She didn't say anything to that. She leaned back against the cushions and half-closed her eyes and I felt she was tired.

"Where you from?"

"Jersey," she said, without looking at me. "Little town south of Trenton." She didn't enlarge on that and I concentrated on the winding hill road.

She opened her eyes once as I slowed down for a bad curve and said, "You drive as though you're in a hurry. Got a date?"

"Yeah," I said shortly. "Got a date with a girl who's gonna get murdered."

She sat up at that and looked at me. I guess she thought I was joking at first, but she sensed I wasn't when I added, "That's why I'm going to Netherton. To see a blond about a murder."

"That's nice," she said.

"What's nice?" I growled.

"Oh, didn't I tell you?" she answered sweetly. "I'm a reporter. I'm starting on the Wether-ton *Herald* as soon as I get there."

## II

WETHERTON IS one of those small hill towns consisting of a square, a hotel and a main street. Private dwellings thin out to rock-bound farms and lonely bayings of dogs within a mile of the business section.

I parked in front of the Wetherton House, a wooden three-decker, verandaed hostelry with an annex and took our suitcases inside. We headed for the hotel desk together and the clerk pushed the resister toward me, smiled at the girl, and said, "Yes, sir? Nice double room facing the valley?"

"Single," I answered.

I signed and turned away, leaving a puzzled clerk and a smiling girl. I had come to Wetherton on business, not pleasure, and already I was close to two hours late.

The elderly bellhop ushered me into a room on the second floor. I gave him a tip and, after he had gone, I stripped and headed for the shower. I felt a lot better when I came out. I changed, glanced in the mirror.

It was the same face I had carried around for years—ever since I left Vermont in fact.

At twenty-eight it was a little fuller, and there was a small scar just above my right eye where a brass knuckle had connected. There was another where it didn't show, a purple welt about five inches long where a piece of red shot shrapnel had skidded across my back.

My face was square and maybe it was what you'd call pleasant-looking—but it was not pretty. My beard was sandy, like my hair, and it didn't show up so much at five o'clock, which was all right by me—I didn't always have time to shave. I ran a comb through my damp hair, but it never does lie down too well, so I let it go.

I was feeling hungry by the time I sat down on the bed and called a number on the bedside phone.

A man's voice with a decided sniffle answered. "Sorry, Miss Wilson is not in," he said.

"I'm Steve Weston," I said bluntly. "She was expecting me."

There was a long pause. Then the voice sniffed, "Miss Wilson left with Mister Creston. They're having dinner at the Cloud's Rest tonight."

I said, "Thanks," and hung up.

I sat on the bed and considered this. Vivian had expected me at four-thirty, and it was now five of six. I could wait until tomorrow to see her, but I was impatient. I finished a cigaret and made my decision.

I went down into the lobby and asked directions to the Cloud's Rest.

"Your second right, just after you leave town, heading north," the clerk said. "It's a steep climb up the shoulder of Graybeard." He hesitated, looked me over, and added courteously enough, "If you plan to have dinner there, sir, you'll have to bring a companion. No one is admitted stag. It's a rule of the place."

I frowned. I wanted to see Vivian tonight. Her voice had sounded urgent when I had talked to her from New York and I knew Vivian was frightened. I turned and saw my hitchiker coming down the stairs into the lobby. She was still dressed in gray slacks and suede jacket.

I intercepted her by the potted palm in front of the dining room door.

"Hello," I said. "Going in to dinner?"

She smiled. "I was."

"Get a dress on," I said, "and powder your nose. We're going to a swanky bistro called the Cloud's Rest."

Her eyebrows arched. "Just a minute, Sir Galahad—"

"Don't argue," I said firmly. "I did you a turn on the road and I expect one from you. It's important—and I can't go stag. Rule of the place," I added.

"Oh!" She hesitated briefly, then her eyes twinkled. "All right."

"I'll be in the bar."

I had finished half a bowl of potato chips and three martinis when she showed up. She wore a simple black dress with just enough of the new look to be pleasing and unantagonizing, and a short white topper.

"My wardrobe—in toto," she said. "Will it do?"

My glance was frankly admiring. "On you, it certainly will." Then, "Want a drink?"

She shook her head. "Later."

The road up to the Cloud's Rest was long and steep and had a couple of bad stretches where a man toying with the idea of suicide could make it without half trying by tramping down hard on the gas.

The parking lot was pretty well filled when I found a spot and nosed the Buick inside. We were pretty high up and the night air had a nip to it. The stars looked low enough to be picked by the handful. I could see the lights of Wetherton way down in the valley.

Verity pulled her topper

around her shoulders and took my arm. The doorman eyed my gray suit a little disdainfully, but nodded appreciatively at Verity and let us in.

We followed a dark-faced, limping waiter captain to a corner table in the rear, just behind a small, circular dance space. On the way there, I looked for Vivian Wilson, but I didn't see her until I sat down.

The bistro was long and rather narrow with the walls finished in knotty pine. The boards must have been recently cut because I could smell the pitch. It was a nice smell, better than stale cigaret smoke. The lights were on the walls behind big, fan-shaped amber shells and the dining room had a restful air. There was a wing off the north wall and I could see a bar.

Then I spotted Vivian. She was seated at a side-wall table across the momentarily deserted dance space, talking to a thin, gray-haired man with a pinched mouth and a cold austere look. This, I assumed, was Marshall Creston, retired Texas oil millionaire.

### III

I HADN'T SEEN Vivian Wilson for all of seven years, and all the way up to Wetherton I had wondered how it would be. I

was making ninety bucks a week then and buying her hamburgers and fries for lunch and we had a lot of fun together. She was a nice kid doing bit parts in off-Broadway shows until Tubby Johnson saw her at a troupe get-together. With Tubby backing her, she went immediately from bits to leading roles, which she handled surprisingly well.

It had all happened a long time ago. She married Johnson and divorced him and now she was angling for the Creston millions. She had come a long way from sleazy off-Broadway stages.

I started to get up and go to her when I felt Verity's hand on mine. I looked at her.

"She's pretty," Verity said sincerely. "Who is she?"

"Broadway actress," I said drily. "Also one of the ex-Mrs. Tubby Johnsons."

"Oh!"

"My client," I explained. "And I'm late—"

I paused. Vivian was getting up. She hadn't seen me. She wore a black satin drape dress with a blazing diamond clip at her left shoulder. She was tall and blonde and walked with an air that caused heads to turn even in the dim amber lighting.

I started to head her off, stopped when I saw she was on her way to the powder room.

Hell, it could wait. I'd talk to her when she got back.

I settled into my chair. Vivian was almost at the door of the ladies room when the dark-faced waiter captain who had ushered Verity and me to our table intercepted her. He handed Vivian what looked like a note, shook his head at something she said. Then the music started and couples moving onto the dance space blocked my view of them.

I asked Verity to dance. She was light and graceful and for a while I forgot Vivian. We ducked the next number and went back to our table. The martinis I had ordered were waiting and an unsmiling waiter took our order.

We made small talk. I found out that Verity had studied journalism and fashion design at Columbia. Getting through college was a lot easier than finding a job. She was working part time covering women's fashions for a local paper when the Wetherton *Herald* answered her application.

"My journalism professor always told us that the way to learn newspapering was to start on some small country weekly," she said, smiling wryly. "So here I am."

I told her about myself, skipping my two years in Vietnam. She was easy to talk to. She lis-

tened well and had a nice smile. She called herself a newspaper woman instead of a newsperson and I found that easier to live with.

The waiter brought our onion soup and for a few moments we gave it our undivided attention. Verity was sitting facing the back, and suddenly I saw her stop and look up. I turned and saw Vivian. She was almost at her table. Marshal Creston put his napkin beside his plate and started to get up with old-fashioned courtesy. Something in his face sent a cold chill through me. It froze into a peculiarly unbelieving mask, his mouth opening as if to utter an exclamation that never came out. He remained half jackknifed over the white table cloth.

Then I saw what had caused his strange reaction. Vivian had taken her hand out of her purse. There was a small caliber revolver in it. At a distance of three feet she could hardly miss. I heard the small, sharp bark of the gun above the throbbing music.

Creston fell face forward across the table, spilling his wine glass and scattering silver.

I jumped up. Verity caught my arm, her face white. I pulled away from her and fought my way through the startled dancers on the floor.



Creston was lying across the table when I got to him. Vivian had vanished. There was a babble of bewildered voices and men and women pressed around.

Creston was dead. I lifted his head, saw the small, bloodrimmed hole between his eyes, let it drop. Then I turned and made for the door.

I kept thinking, *This is one hell of a mess!* I had come to Wetherton to keep Vivian from getting killed, only to have her murder Creston right under my nose. It didn't make sense.

I heard the roar of a powerful motor as I got to the front door. A big black sedan was swinging off the parking lot, its tires kicking up gravel.

I felt a hand on my arm. It was Verity. "Come on," I said and we ran to my Buick.

Verity slid under the wheel to her side of the seat and I got in beside her and slammed the door. The engine choked a couple of times under my anxious foot before it smoothed out. I backed out into the clear and swung around. My headlights picked up a group of curious customers clustered around the door. By time I hit the gravel-packed road the sedan's tail lights were vanishing around a bend.

I took it easy down that winding grade. I didn't see the sedan's lights again, but I could hear it roaring through the pitch dark at reckless speed.

Verity didn't say anything. She sat hunched up on the seat, staring out into the blackness cut by my high beams. She looked small and scared.

I kept both hands on the wheel and tried not to think what a blowout on one of the bends could do. Suddenly the motor up ahead cut out as though Vivian were slowing for a sharp curve. Then it picked up. The high dark mountain ridges made a sounding board that threw the sedan's engine noises back to me. Then the crash reached us—a long rending impact followed by a series of lesser grinding sounds.

It seemed to reverberate along the ridges for a long time before it quieted. Then only the

sound of my motor broke the stillness.

Five minutes later I pulled up by the splintered guard rail and looked down into a dark ravine. There was enough light to make out the sedan lying on its top almost three hundred feet below.

I said, "Wait here," to Verity and scrambled down for a look.

The county sheriff was a keen-faced wiry man with a dry mountain twang. Someone had called him from the Cloud's Rest and he had come up the grade with his deputy in his car. Several other autos were parked behind mine by this time and curious couples lined the rail on either side of the splintered section where the sedan had crashed through.

I went down to the wreck again with him and his deputy. Vivian was pinned under the front seat. She didn't look pretty. She was dead when I came down the first time and tried to get her body free.

Sheriff Ainsworth flashed his light, chewed on a stub of a cigar, then sent his deputy back to the car to call for an ambulance and a tow truck. He watched his deputy climb back up the slope, then turned and asked what in hell I was doing there?

I showed him my identification, told him Miss Wilson had

called me from New York concerning business and tried to make it sound important. He grunted but didn't say anything.

The smell of spilled gas was pretty strong in the ravine. "Lucky the car didn't burn," he said. "We wouldn't have found enough of her to identify."

I shrugged. "One chance in a hundred, but it didn't."

The sheriff flashed his light around until he found a small rock outcropping that suited him. He spread his handkerchief over a portion of it and sat down. He had on a newly cleaned uniform and he was being careful of it.

I didn't fancy sitting here until the ambulance turned up, so I started up the ravine.

Sheriff Ainsworth's dry voice said, "Just a minute, Weston."

I turned around and waited for him to go on.

"The phone call I got from the Cloud's Rest was from the manager. He knew Mr. Creston and Miss Wilson well enough to identify them." The sheriff shifted the cigar stub in his mouth. "He said Miss Wilson had shot Creston. Is that right?"

I shrugged. "It looked that way to me, too," I said. Vivian was dead. There was no sense in my trying to cover up for her.

"What did Miss Wilson want to see you for?"

"Funny thing," I replied. "She was afraid of being murdered. She didn't want to talk about it over the phone, so I made an appointment to meet her at four-thirty at the Wetherton House." I went on to explain my delay and my decision to see her at the mountaintop restaurant instead of waiting overnight.

The sheriff didn't say anything but I could almost hear him turn this over and around in his head. After a while he said, "All right, Weston—you can go. But stay in town for a few days. Until after the inquest."

I nodded.

Verity was waiting by the car when I reached the road. "Steve!" Her voice sounded a little frightened. "What kept you?"

"A country dick with a cigar in his mouth," I said curtly. "Why?"

She stiffened at my tone. We got into the car and there was suddenly a difference. She was cold and distant and I didn't like it.

"What's bothering you?" I asked, and I knew I was only making things worse. But right then I didn't feel like saying I was sorry for being brusque.

"Read all about it in the

Wetherton *Herald*," she said.

I left bad enough alone and concentrated on getting back to town.

#### IV

WE PARTED in the lobby in an icy silence and I went up to my room. I put in my call, but I didn't reach Randall. I tried several places I knew and finally left word with the answering service for him to get in touch with me as soon as he got in and hung up. Then I sat on the bed and did some heavy thinking.

No matter how I looked at it, it didn't make sense. Vivian Wilson had called up the Randall Investigation Agency because she knew I still worked for Randall. Maybe it was a sentimental gesture but her voice had sounded scared. Vivian didn't scare easily. Someone, she was positive, intended to kill her. She couldn't explain over the phone but would give me the details when I got here.

I had arrived too late for our appointment. And then, in a mountain restaurant, she had pulled a fantastic aboutface and killed Marshal Creston, the man rumor had it she was going to marry.

I got that far, then began to think in circles. Finally I got up and walked to my suitcase.

The half bottle of Scotch was still there. I found a glass in the bathroom and poured a stiff drink. Then I lighted a cigaret and sat down again.

There was a knock on the door. Verity opened it at my, "Come on in," and stepped inside. She looked at me with a funny little twitch of her nose and said, "Still in a barking mood, Steve?"

I had to smile at the look on her face. "No," I said. "I'm sorry I acted the way I did. Come on in."

She closed the door and came in and sat down facing me. I pointed to my glass, said, "Want one of these?" but she shook her head. She seemed worried about something.

"That girl," she said. "Miss Wilson."

"What about her?"

"She didn't kill Creston."

I looked at her. "You need glasses," I said brittly. "Horn-rimmed and double-lensed."

Verity's lips tightened. "All right, Sherlock. Crack this your way." She got up and headed for the door.

"Wait a minute." I got in front of her. "I'm sorry. Come back and sit down. I'll listen."

She gave me a long cool look for a moment, then sat down again. "I looked Miss Wilson over after you pointed her out to me. I especially noticed her

dress. That was a Dior original or I don't know my clothes."

"So?"

"That's what she had on when I first saw her. Then she got up and went to the powder room."

"Wait!" I interrupted her, suddenly remembering. "The waiter captain with the limp intercepted her. She didn't go to the powder room."

"I didn't see that," Verity said. "But I did notice Miss Wilson again when she came back. I could see her though the dancers. Something about her bothered me—something about her gown. The shoulder lines were different, and the draping wasn't quite the same. It could have been a copy—a very good copy—of the Dior original she had on five minutes before. But it was not the same dress!"

I stared at her.

"So . . . either she changed her gown in the powder room," Verity concluded, "or the girl who shot Creston wasn't Vivian Wilson."

I got up and walked to the window. It sounded crazy. But it made sense, if you looked at it Verity's way. Someone wanted to kill Vivian—she knew it—and that was why she'd called me. But someone had tricked her into leaving the Cloud's Rest. It had to be the killer who came back instead,

dressed like Vivian Wilson. He, more likely she, killed Creston and got out of there before anyone realized what had happened.

"You sure about that dress?" I said, turning back to Verity Jones. "Because if you're right, it blows the Creston murder wide open."

She said quite calmly, "I'm as sure of it as I am that my name is Verity Jones."

I grinned. "You ought to be sure of that, anyway."

She laughed, then stopped and a little pucker drew her brows together. "I almost forgot—what's Tubby Johnson doing in Wetherston?"

"Huh?" I said.

"I saw him down in the lobby," she replied. "A few minutes before I came up here. He was on his way out."

I called the desk. "Is there a Mr. Johnson registered here? Clarence E. Johnson?" I remembered the name, but no one I knew ever called him anything but "Tubby."

"Why, yes," the desk clerk answered. "Mr. Johnson checked in shortly after you left this evening. Is there anything I—"

"There isn't," I cut him off and dropped the phone back in its cradle. I looked at Verity, shook my head. I was puzzled

and mad and then the phone rang.

It was Mr. Randall, my boss. I recognized his voice before he said three words. "Look, Mike," I said, cutting into his dry, carping tone. "Let me tell you what's happened up here."

Randall swore with feeling when I finished. "This is a hell of a note!" he snapped. "I send you up there to take care of a client and you let her commit murder and then kill herself trying to get away. Either you're slipping, Steve, or—"

"Cut the comedy," I growled. "What's Tubby Johnson doing up here? Did he let you know he was coming to Wetherston?"

"No, he didn't. But the man's over twenty-one. And with his money he can go where he wants. Why is that bothering you?"

"It isn't—much," I muttered. "But there's a few things I'd like to get straight. How did he know Vivian was in trouble in the first place? Did she call him and tell him? That wouldn't make sense, Mike. She was through with him. She was angling for Creston."

"All I know," Randall snapped back, "is that Johnson offered to double our fee if you'd go to Wetherston right away. He said he'd found out someone was threatening Vivian and he didn't want to see her hurt!"

"Well, Vivian's dead," I reminded him. "It looks like we're left holding the bag on this one. But I want to stay on a while. There's something that smells—"

"I'm not paying you for sniffing," Randall cut in. "We no longer have a client, thanks to you. Johnson won't pay for protection Vivian didn't get. So make up your mind, Steve. If you stay, you'll be doing it on your own time!"

"All right," I cracked back. "On my own time—and permanent!" I slammed the receiver down and turned to Verity. I had lost a job. But I can be bull-headed when someone pushes me. I wanted to see this thing through. Verity's angle on what had happened might be a wild guess—and then again, it might lead to something.

I was thinking of Vivian, too. We had had some good times together.

Verity saw the look in my eyes. She said softly, "I'll see you in the morning."

V

THE INQUEST was held the next morning. I got a call from the sheriff's office to be at the courthouse at eleven. The meeting was held in a small room off the town clerk's office. Verity was there, both as a witness

and as the *Herald* reporter. A tall, blond, apple-cheeked young man turned out to be Creston's nephew—Larry Taylor. A dark-skinned, tight-mouthed small man in a chauffeur's uniform—Argus Seifret—drove the Creston cars.

The coroner, a paunchy, jovial man, made the routine statement. "Deceased—One Marshall Creston, fifty-six, summer resident on Taber's Ridge Road. Death instantaneous from a bullet of thirty-two caliber.

"Also deceased—Vivian Wilson, age approximately twenty-six, ex-actress. Broken neck and multiple internal injuries resulting from a car crash off Graybeard's shoulder."

The inquest also brought out a few items that were of interest to me. Larry Taylor, it seemed, was Creston's only close living relative. He had been staying with his uncle on Taber's Ridge.

Argus, the chauffeur, had been in bed with the flu last night. He still looked a little under the weather. His eyes were bloodshot and he sniffled continuously into a handkerchief.

Larry had offered to drive last night, but his uncle had decided to take the wheel himself.

Both Argus and Larry admit-

ted that Miss Wilson, staying at the Creston home as a house guest, had had several arguments with Uncle Marshall. Neither, however, had even remotely imagined they would lead to murder.

The official conclusion was foregone. Both bodies identified, deaths established as murder and accidental—case closed.

Tubby Johnson was a spectator. Somehow he had gained admittance to the inquest. As a former husband of Miss Wilson he might have been asked to identify the body and then allowed to remain.

Johnson was a short, round man without the expected fat man's good humor. He had small, porcine eyes and a vitriolic temper encouraged by a lifetime of having people jump at his whims. He hurried after me as we left the room.

I stopped and waited for him in the hallway outside. He looked genuinely hurt and I realized the man must have been really in love with Vivian.

"I was ready to pay you five thousand dollars, Weston," he wheezed, "if you had kept her from being killed."

"Look, Mister Johnson," I said patiently, "I'm a private investigator, not a magician. I didn't know she was going to kill Creston. And I couldn't stop her from driving off the road."

Johnson lost his temper. "You didn't *try!*" he screamed. "If you had gotten there on time—"

I put a hand on his paunch, said, "You're in my way, Tubby," and pushed him aside. He had never had anyone cut him off before and it left him temporarily speechless. I didn't look back.

I left Verity at the entrance to the Wetherton *Herald* and wandered back to the hotel. My car was still parked out front. I got in and drove back to the Cloud's Rest, slowing down by the splintered guard rail where Vivian had gone through into the ravine.

It was a nice sunny day. The air was like a glass of Chianti, and the valley was a riot of autumn color. But death still hung in the air.

An old man was washing the floor at the Cloud's Rest. I walked inside and looked around. The chairs were stacked up and the tables pushed into a corner. There was no one in the manager's office. I came back to the man, who quit his floor washing and looked up at me.

"I'm looking for a waiter captain," I said. "A short, dark fellow with a limp."

The old man frowned. "Guess you mean Duke. He lives in the Wetherton House on Main

Street . . . in the Annex in back."

I nodded my thanks and went out, pausing to look down into the valley. Wetherton was a cluster of toy blocks. I let my gaze drift across the timbered saddle to Taber's Ridge. The windows of the Creston House, a wide rambling fieldstone structure, sparkled like flashing mirrors in the afternoon sun.

I drove slowly down the winding road and impulse made me stop by the spot where Vivian had crashed. I was working on the threads of an idea. After a few moments of looking down into the ravine where the sedan still lay, I turned and walked back up the road.

I had noticed the old wagon trace on my way up, half hidden by young growth. I followed it, my shoes making no sound in the thick dry dust in the ruts. The mountain stillness was intensified as I entered a thick pine stand.

Then the odor came to me. I tried to place it, got it—the faint acrid smell of burning cloth.

I unbuttoned my coat so that I could reach my gun in a hurry and swung into a trot. The road ahead made a turn around a tall spruce. A rabbit in the road darted off, startling me.



He must have startled somebody else, too. I heard someone move around the bend, crashing through dry brush. I drew my gun, rounded the bend—then I saw it.

Someone had built a roughly circular firepit off the side of the old wagon road, enclosing it with stones. The smoke, barely curled from something still smouldering.

Somebody had been burning something here. I had scared him off. I walked to the firepit, looked around. It was quiet again, too quiet. Sweat lay cold on the back of my neck as I bent over the firepit, raked among the ashes. Small bits of black satin came to hand, the

charred heel of a woman's shoe. I started to pick it up and the bullet went *zuttt!* against the rock close to my fingers, then made a high whining sound as it ricocheted off among the trees.

I did a backflip and kept rolling. I didn't hear the crack of the rifle, which could mean it was too far away to be heard, or that it wore a silencer. I didn't wait to find out. When a man with a rifle has you spotted and you don't even have an idea where he's drawing a bead from, it's time to fade, brother—and fast!

I got out of that clearing on my hands and knees and broke into a run down the path. I didn't breathe easy until I was behind the wheel of the Buick and gunning it down the road.

I brushed past Tubby Johnson in the Wetherton House lobby, ignoring his efforts to detain me. He was arranging Vivian's funeral, I heard.

The desk clerk nodded at my request. "Duke Beserti? He's in the Annex, room thirty-three."

I went through the back door, into the Annex and up the stairs, taking them two at a time. The door to room 33 was unlocked. I found this out after I had knocked twice and received no answer. I stepped inside and looked around. The

water was running inside the bathroom. That explained why he hadn't heard me, or so it seemed then.

I was wrong.

I found Duke floating face down in the fully drawn tub, his legs bent under him. The water was still running and if it hadn't been for the overflow drain it would have flooded the tile floor. I didn't have to touch him to know Duke was dead as mutton.

I came out to the bedroom, called the sheriff.

Sheriff Ainsworth came out of the tiny bathroom. He sat down in the easy chair by the window and listened. I told him about the note Duke had handed Vivian Wilson last night, making it the reason why I had been interested in seeing him. Ainsworth listened without comment. I liked the way he took this. No fuss, no fluster no trying to tack Duke's killing to me.

I was tempted to tell him about Verity's theory but thought better of it.

He got up when I finished, picked up the phone and called the coroner. I started for the door.

He put his palm over the mouthpiece as he looked at me. "I know this is getting monotonous, Weston," he said drily, "but I think you'd better

stick around Wetherton a few days more."

I nodded and went out.

I called Verity at the *Herald* from the phone in my room and asked her to lunch. It was past three and she'd already had lunch, but she said she'd have coffee with me if she could get off. "I've been doing a little snooping around in the *Herald* morgue," she said excitedly, "and I think I have something for you."

I said, "That's great, Doctor Watson," and hung up.

Down in the lobby I saw Tubby Johnson again. He was talking to Argus, the Creston chauffeur. Johnson was shaking his head and frowning. Argus seemed insistent.

They went quiet and I crossed the lobby and Argus gave me a long, searching look.

I picked up Verity at the *Herald* and we walked across the street to the Blue Mountain Tea Room. Verity shook her hair out on her shoulders as we slid into a booth. I was suddenly conscious of her vitality, her unstudied freshness.

"Well," I said, after I'd ordered, "what has Doctor Watson to report?"

"I looked up Larry Taylor in the morgue," she said. "Creston's only sister married an obscure man who died in sixty-three. Larry was their only

child. She died soon afterward and Creston took the boy in. Sent him through Groton and then to Harvard. Here's an interesting pic." She slid a faded three-column cut toward me.

It looked like the chorus line of an old musical—a bunch of bare-legged steppers—until I looked closer and noticed the hairy legs and brawny builds. "Hasty Pudding Club," Verity said. "Look at the one third from the left."

I whistled. Then I leaned back and took out a cigaret. I held out the pack and she took one and I lighted hers first.

"One thing more," Verity added. She was excited and pleased with herself. "I stopped in at Louise's—exclusive clothes on Main Street. There's a copy of the dress Miss Wilson wore in the window. I want you to see it."

The window dummy didn't do the dress justice. But I wasn't interested in that particularly. To me the dress looked like the one Vivian had worn, but to Verity there were differences. "Notice the sleeves—and the neckline—"

I said, "All right. I'll take your word for it. You're the fashion designer on this team." That was all I had to go on, Verity's word, plus her schooling. If she was wrong, then the whole thing that was shaping

up in my mind would fall through.

We went inside. A slender woman with blue-gray hair greeted us.

I said, "We're interested in the dress you have in the window. The black satin. But my wife—" this was a quick one and I glanced at Verity to see how she'd take it. She made no move to correct me. "—wants to know if it's an exclusive." I smiled. "You know how women are."

She nodded and smiled at Verity. "You must know," she said pleasantly, "that it's only a copy of a Dior original. However, it *is* exclusive up here. Miss Wilson, before she so unfortunately—" she hesitated, then "—ordered the only other gown like it that we had on hand last week."

"Did she come in for it?" Verity asked.

"Well—no. One of the servants—it was a man's voice on the telephone—asked that it be delivered. I remember he explained that Miss Wilson had seen the dress in the window and decided to buy it. Fortunately it was a size eight, her size."

"Isn't that a bit unusual?" Verity murmured, "for a woman like Miss Wilson to buy a dress like that? I mean, without even coming in to see it?"

The saleslady shrugged, said, "Yes."

I filled in with the man's angle. "What are you asking for it?"

"A mere eighty-nine dollars and ninety-five cents," she said, smiling. "A rare value for a good copy of an exclusive gown like—"

"We'll think it over," I cut in. "Good day."

When we were outside I said, "This cinches it for me, Verity. But I've got to work fast—before the birds fly the coop."

She took my arm. "They killed Creston and Vivian—and Duke. They won't stop at another murder. Don't go up there alone."

I gave her a long look, then I kissed her.

"I've never had anyone worry about me since my mother died," I said. "But keep on doing it, Verity. I like it."

I left her standing in front of the *Herald*.

## VI

THE CRESTON HOUSE lights loomed up as I topped the private road and swung in past high wrought-iron gates. I parked under an ivy-covered portico and got out.

The house had been built on the edge of the ridge. Creston must have gone to a lot of ex-

pense to have the land cleared and leveled, not to mention that it must have cost a pretty penny to build the twelve-room house, even when pennies bought a whole lot more than they do today. There were a grape arbor and a summer house past the main building.

Starlight glinted on a low-slung yellow Jaguar parked in the driveway. I had seen *that* car before.

There was one other thing I wanted to get straightened out in my mind. The way the house was built, it looked across a wide ravine to Greybeard's south shoulder. It was getting quite dark, but even so I could pick out the approximate spot on the old wagon road where I had been shot at.

From any one of the north windows, a man could have covered that road. The distance was about a thousand yards, not an impossible shot for a man with a high-powered rifle and telescopic sights.

I walked up the broad stone steps and pushed the announcer button. I waited a couple of minutes and rang again. After a while, the door opened a crack and Argus looked out at me.

I said, "I'm Steve Weston. I was at the inquest this morning, remember?"

Argus was in shirtsleeves rolled up to his elbows, and his

black tie was askew. I smelled liquor on his breath. He looked a little drunk.

"Sure," he said. "Sure, I remember you. The private dick from the big city."

"I want to see Mr. Taylor. Something important has come up."

Argus considered this. I saw him glance back into the house. Then he shrugged. "I'll check to see if Mr. Taylor will see you."

I waited, another four or five minutes and then he came back, adjusting his tie and smirking. He had his chauffeur's coat on and I knew he was carrying an under-arm gun.

"This way," he said.

He let me step past him and pointed down the hall. He fell in behind me and I felt hair prickle on my back. I didn't like the idea of having this half-cocked killer at my back.

Taylor was waiting in the library. It was done in dark oak panels with bookshelves lining the walls. There was a back door just behind a huge mahogany desk. It wasn't closed tight.

Taylor was sitting behind the desk, leaning back in a comfortable position, watching me as I came in.

"Steve Weston," he said coolly.

Argus slipped in behind me

and remained standing by the door. For a hired hand, he was very much at home here. I glanced at the desk, where a freshly lighted, tailored cigaret lay smoking in an ashtray.

"You want to see me?" Taylor asked.

"You don't look particularly bereaved," I observed.

Taylor smiled. "Why should I put on an act? I never made any bones about the way I felt. Uncle Marshall was a sour old miser and I'm not altogether sorry Miss Wilson killed him. Too bad she didn't get away."

"Yeah," I said. "Too bad. She didn't break her neck trying to get away."

Taylor leaned forward abruptly and I felt Argus move in closer. But I kept my eyes on Creston's nephew. The color came back into his face and he laughed.

"I saw Miss Wilson on the slab at the undertaker's," he said. "She was as dead as Uncle Marshall and in worse shape."

I shrugged. "The body was Miss Wilson's, all right," I said. I was banking everything I had that I had recognized that Jaguar, that Tubby Johnson was behind that not quite closed door. I wanted him particularly to hear what I had to say. I raised my voice a little.

"But she *didn't* kill your uncle. Someone gave Duke, the

waiter captain at the Cloud's Rest, a note for her and she stepped outside. She was slugged and someone else took her place—someone dressed to look exactly like her. Someone who knew that no one would pay close attention as he walked back to the Creston Table and shot Creston."

Taylor's lips were twitching. He gave a nervous laugh. "What kind of story are you concocting, Weston? Are you telling me that a man posing as Miss Wilson killed my uncle?"

I nodded grimly.

"I did a little checking up," I said. "You were in the Hassy Pudding show, class of sixty-nine. You're not a big man. With a wig and a little makeup and close copies of Miss Wilson's clothes and accessories, you could pass for her to anyone who didn't know her, or had a chance to look at you too closely."

"Go on," Taylor sneered, "Tell me what happened next."

"You and Argus kidnaped Miss Wilson. While Argus dumped her in the sedan and got the motor going, you took her place and killed your uncle. Then, in the confusion, you ran out and got into the car. All this took very little time. You were already dressed like Miss Wilson, in a copy of her gown you had ordered from Louise's.

"You had the rest of it planned down to detail. Argus slowed the sedan at the curve enough to let both of you jump. The sedan went through the railing with Miss Wilson it it."

Taylor was staring at me now, his face bloodless.

"You and your chauffeur took the old wagon road across the slope to the house here. On the way you got rid of the clothes you wore. Then, this morning, you went back to the clearing where you had hidden them and burned the dress and accessories. You couldn't risk doing it last night. The fire would have attracted attention."

I paused, added, "Too bad I came along, before you were through—".

Argus cut in, his voice blurred. "I guess we heard enough."

I turned and saw the automatic in his hand. He was standing spread-legged about ten feet from me, an ugly sneer on his face.

"I won't miss you," he said thinly. "Not from here."

"Why don't you try drowning me instead, like you did Duke Biserti?" I countered. "You saw me drive up to the Cloud's Rest and guessed I'd be looking for Duke. He could identify you as the man who handed him a note for Miss Wilson last night, couldn't he?" I kept my voice steady. "Killing Duke wasn't

part of the plan, though, was it?"

"No!" Taylor said harshly, getting to his feet. "Nor your sticking your nose into it. But you're in too far now for us to let you go."

I played my hole card. "All right, Tubby," I said loudly. "You can come out now."

Taylor started, and for a minute no one moved. Then the back door opened and Johnson came into the room. His face was white.

"Steve!" he said quaveringly, "I didn't know—"

"The hell you didn't!" I snapped. "You said you didn't want anything to happen to Vivian Wilson. So you hired the Randall Agency to send a man up here to act as her bodyguard. You were still in love with her, you said. Hell! You loved her so much you couldn't stand losing her to another man."

"You didn't care about the others you had married. But Vivian was different. Even after she got her divorce, you didn't want to lose her. When you heard she was going to marry Marshall Creston, you hired Argus and Taylor to kill her. But you have to cover yourself, so you came to Randall with a phony story about wanting to help Vivian."

"No, no!" Tubby cried. "You've got it all wrong, Wes-

ton. I never wanted to kill her. Just scare her enough to leave Creston. That's the truth, and I'll swear to it."

"Shut up!" Taylor snapped. "He's guessing. He can't prove a thing."

"I didn't want Vivian killed!" Tubby screamed over him. "I'm not going to take the blame for—"

Argus stepped clear of me and shot him. He was using a small caliber pistol and Tubby was a large man. He didn't move. Only his eyes widened and he leaned against the desk as though suddenly tired.

Argus was turning toward me when I swung from the heels, my right hand catching him on the side of his jaw. I weigh one-ninety and Argus probably less than one-forty, but I didn't feel ashamed of myself. He skidded across the floor toward the back door and his gun slid the other way. I made a grab for mine under my coat.

Johnson was still standing, looking blankly down at his chest. Taylor was coming fast around the desk, trying to get a clean shot at me.

I beat him to it.

He whirled, hit the edge of his desk on the other side of Johnson and sat down. I walked over and kicked the gun out of his hand. Taylor cursed me,

clutching his bullet-torn shoulder.

I helped Johnson to a chair, sat him down. He was in a state of shock, but he'd live.

I said drily: "Nice friends you have, Tubby."

The carpet in the hallway must have muffled their steps, or maybe the sound of the shots was still ringing in my ears. I didn't hear them come in until Sheriff Ainsworth's voice growled, "This is getting monotonous, Weston!"

I turned. Ainsworth and his deputy came into the room, Verity behind them. Her eyes lighted up when she saw I was all right.

She stopped. "You big baboon!" she said with a funny little catch in her throat. "You—"

I went to her, chucked her under her chin. "It's wonderful to know you care," I said.

I got a call from Randall when the story broke in the New York papers. Tubby Johnson was a prominent figure and they played it up big. There was a picture of Tubby sitting up in his hospital bed, talking to reporters, and mug shots of Taylor and Argus, who

were being held on homicide charges.

I cut Randall off. Then I called Verity up at the *Herald* and told her about Randall's call.

"Randall wants me back," I said. "But I've decided against it."

"Why?" she asked softly.

"I think I'll go it on my own. I've got enough salted away to rent a small office and hang out my sign. All I need is an assistant who can take notes."

"Yes?" she said, waiting.

"You're hired if you want the job," I said.

There was a long pause. Then her voice came with a little laugh in it. "Assistant sounds awful. Male chauvinistic. How about—partner?"

"Weston and Jones?"

"We'll flip for first billing," she said.

I considered. Hell, this was 1975.

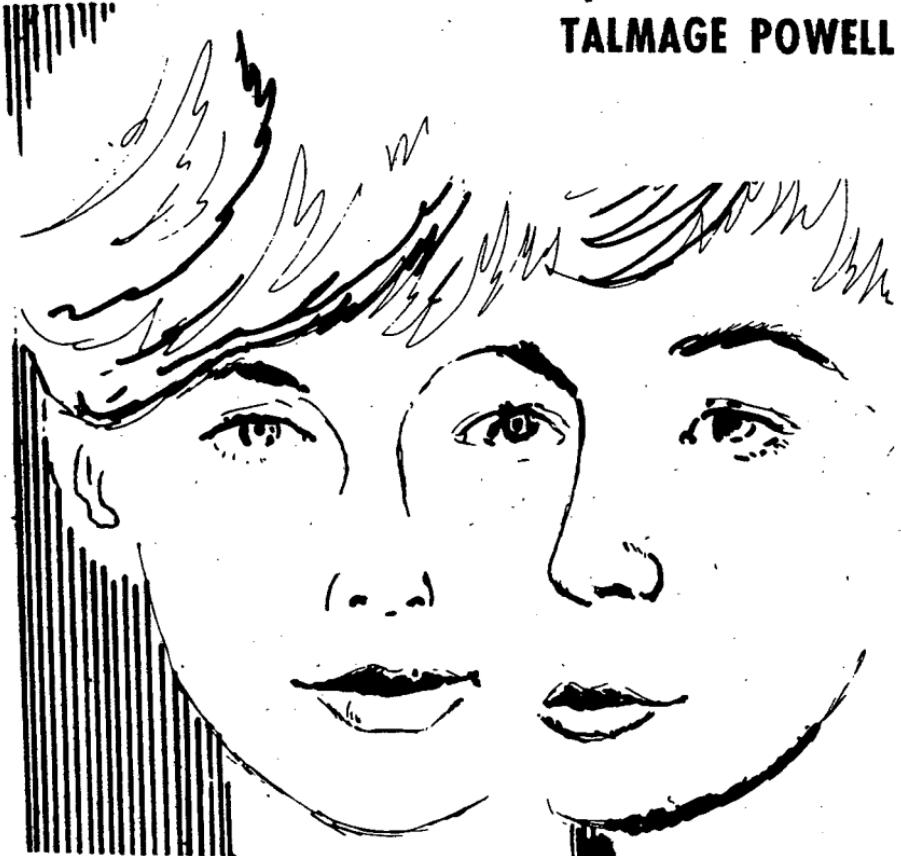
"You've got a deal," I said. I looked out the window. I was even considering making it a lifetime partnership. Then I scowled. One thing I'd put my foot down hard on—it would be Mrs. Weston, not Ms. Jones!

But I was getting ahead of myself, wasn't I?

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By

TALMAGE POWELL

## THE PLUNGE

*Somewhere out there she waited, the girl who  
laughed at death—yet sought after it...*

EVERY SLENDER muscle straining, Cecil Wexler spiraled his black sedan up the treacherous, fog-swathed road with a recklessness not usually associated

with indoorish fellows in their mid-forties.

His thin body was hunched tensely over the steering wheel. His face, with gashed mouth

and slightly sunken cheeks, was as gray as the dirty mist writhing out of the Pacific. His burning eyes flickered as the white, slender shadow of a guard rail swirled at him out of the nothingness.

He jerked his quivering foot from the gas pedal, breaking the whine of the car's engine, and pulled the wheel over hard to the left. He felt the yielding, the looseness of control, the anger of the car as it fought him. The guard rail was rushing at him broadside, and he was suspended in the eerie certainty that the skidding car would smash through. He imagined the car hanging in space before it plunged with him to the boulder-strewn Pacific beach three, four, or five hundred feet below.

For a fractured, twisted instant in time, his throbbing brain teetered on the needlepoint of decision. He was so tired, so very tired, and the chase so useless. He would never catch Dawn, his daughter, in time to stop her from whatever her drug-fevered mind was driving her to.

Turn loose, he thought. Let the powers of darkness have their way.

But the image of Dawn's face flashed through his mind, stronger than the urge to quit, and he wrestled the wheel and

touched the accelerator. He felt the rear wheels spewing gravel, then the solidity of macadam. The white center line sliced the windshield.

He coaxed the fishtailing car back to the right, steadied its charge. The deadly curve was safely behind, but he felt no relief. Dawn was still lost, in more ways than one, in the fog and darkness-shrouded heights ahead, and the moment was gone when he might have surrendered and escaped an emotional hell forever, unless there was a greater hell beyond the grave.

His seared eyes bored into the roiling mists. Twin gray giants resolved in the left perimeter of his headlights. They seemed to waver in the fog, animate spires of stone threatening to move out and block his pursuit of Dawn.

His over-wrought imagination steadied the objects into what they were, tall pillars with brass name plaques marking the turn-off of a long private driveway.

As the sedan whined past, Cecil glimpsed the bright, cheerful lights of the house above, a haven snugged to the heights and disdainful of mud slide and earthquake on its bulwarks of concrete.

He thought of the people up there, sipping an after-dinner

brandy or amusing themselves in a rumpus room. Did they know about pain, real pain, the kind that mattered, the silent bleeding of the spirit?

Dawn came from a house no less expensive, where the lights were just as bright and all the creature comforts in reach of a fingertip.

Red reflectors warning of danger glared ahead as the road hairpinned hard to the left, straining toward the gray-tendrilled emptiness over the distant ocean below. The car swept Wexler dizzily, and then the faintest sound came from his lips as he glimpsed once again the tail lights of Dawn's saucy little Ferrari.

They winked at him as if to say, "Come on, Daddy, catch me if you can."

They vanished, extinguished by the foggy night, another curve, or a brief failure in his vision. He was in such a state that he couldn't surely decide which. He dared to lift his right hand from the steering wheel and palm the wetness from his forehead.

He slithered the sedan around a bend, and the saw-tooth jaggedness of the sierra crest was a jumble of deeper blackness against the sky.

A hard frown knotted between his frantic eyes. The Ferrari's tail lights should have

reappeared, but they hadn't. The road ahead was as empty as the corner of some distant, lifeless, cold planet.

A catch broke the hard rhythm of Wexler's breathing. How could she have disappeared so completely, so suddenly? The obvious answer caused him almost to black out. He slowed the car almost to a stop in the middle of the road. He crushed his lower lip between his teeth as he fought the sensation of fainting, falling. His head shook in desperate denial.

"No, no," he said, aloud, "she didn't drive over the edge. She wouldn't do that..."

As if in answer to his fervent wish, he glimpsed a reflection of bright orange color in the headlights. He slowed, twisted the steering wheel, and the Ferrari existed once more in the full glare of the headlights. Dawn had pulled off on an over-look and parked the car, and Wexler's surroundings took shape and form again.

He slammed the sedan to a rocking stop behind the small sports car, threw himself out, and half dropped beside the Ferrari, hands clutching the window frame as his tormented vision absorbed the emptiness of the interior.

He lurched back, straightening, jerking his face in all directions. She couldn't have

gone far. She hadn't had time. She must have stopped here on the over-look with the insane, drugged impulse to be a part of the crazy night for a moment, to breathe the fog and darkness and unreal emptiness. Yes, he thought, no other reason than that. Let it be no other reason...

"Go back, daddy."

With a spine-jolting snap of his stringy, narrow-shouldered body, he spun toward the direction of her voice. He saw her, a vague, slender shadow, standing with her back against the guard rail and looking at him from a dozen yards away.

"Dawn..." his voice dried to nothing. He couldn't get anything else out for a second.

"I don't want you here, daddy."

"Dawn, it's damp. It's chill." He forced a steadiness, a fatherly roughness. "We've had enough of this nonsense for one night."

"Then go home and beddy-bye, dear daddy."

He continued an unsteady pace toward her. She resolved into the dear, familiar details, slender, girlish figure, small, sweet oval-shaped face, yellow hair. Gentle mouth, nice little nose, clear, high forehead, even brows, and eyes... No, no! The eyes weren't hers! The eyes had been dreamed up by a money-

mad chemist putting acids and pills together in a clandestine, bootleg laboratory.

She slipped aside as he reached to touch her. Her lips curled out a brittle burst of laughter that was far from sane.

"Game of tag, daddy? Like when I was a little girl? Only you can't catch me now."

"Dawn, please!"

"Look at yourself, daddy. Pasty-faced and puny. Catch me if you can!"

Before he could move, she had vaulted over the guard rail and was picking her way out on a spiny, jutting finger of stone. Her arms were outstretched to either side and she placed her feet carefully, body tipping, tilting, keeping a precarious balance.

Wexler stood paralyzed, afraid not to move, equally afraid that any movement would snap the fine thread of her equilibrium and send her into the darkness of the bottomless abyss.

He dared breathe when she reached the end of the outcropping and turned slowly, as a high-wire performer turns for the return trip, no more than a six-inch width of stone beneath her slender, sandalled feet.

The sight of her poised out there, with nothing but ethereal darkness above, be-

hind, and below her, filled Wexler with a nauseating vertigo. Cold prickles covered his sweating body. A brassy taste swept through his mouth. He clenched his fists at his sides and bit his teeth together hard. *Hang on, he told himself, it's all up to you. Fool of a father that you are, you've got to do something!*

But what? If he told her to come back, drug-motivated obstinacy might cause her to refuse. If he dared her, she might accept.

Her sudden laugh was a tinkly bell breaking the silence. "Why so downcast, so fearful, daddy? Something here your checkbook can't buy? Afraid to see what you are seeing?"

Involuntarily, he had moved. He felt the guard rail pressing against his in-drawn stomach. She was near, no more than a dozen feet, suspended out there giggling at him. But for all he could think in a practical vein, she was as near as the closest star. His thoughts were a wild jumble, an incoherence of plans. He would walk out, take her hand, walk her back... He would grab her waist, locking his legs around the finger of stone to keep them from falling... He would clamber over the guard rail and shock her to sanity with the threat to jump himself...

Nothing would do, nothing. He stood clutching the guard rail, the rust flecks embedding in his palms. His brain was swelling, bursting, receding. And then the glimmer of a thought came to him. Fantastic thought. Wild, crazy, but in her state it might seem like pure sanity. It was the only thing he could think of. It would keep her attention, give him time.

He touched his parched lips with the tip of his tongue. "You're a very brave girl, Dawn."

She tilted her head, studying him. "You're up to something, Daddy. What are you leading up to? I won't come down, you know. I like it out here."

"I know, but your mother is waiting for us. Let's let her know how great everything is. Then we'll come back. She'll want to come with us."

She struggled with the concept of her mother for a moment. At least, Wexler knew, he had caught her attention.

Her face etched a painful frown. "Mother is dead, daddy. You killed her, a long time ago. In the car crash. Don't you remember?"

He closed his eyes and felt his knees giving away. With an effort of will, he shored up the collapse. "No, no! I didn't kill your mother. How could I? I loved her."

"It was an accident, daddy. It hurt you terribly. It took you from me. You didn't know I was still around for a long, long time. Or you didn't care. There! That's more accurate. But I was around all the time, even the times I needed you and you didn't care."

"You've got it wrong, Dawn."

"No, daddy."

"Yes!" he said, an almost savage ring in his voice. "You've got it all wrong. I didn't kill her! You dreamed it, Dawn. She's alive. She's at home, waiting for us. So careful now, take a few steps, lay hold of my hand..."

He rolled across the guard rail, conscious of the sickening emptiness just beyond his feet. He clutched the rail with his left hand and stretched his right out toward her as far as he could.

"Here," he said hoarsely. "My hand. Take it!"

She stood unmoving, lips pursed, giggling at him again.

"You look silly," she said. "Why are you afraid? I'm not afraid."

"Your mother has a surprise for you," he entreated.

"I don't want it," she pouted. "I like it out here."

She turned then, slowly, facing away from him, poised on the tip of stone with the stance of a high-diver.

Her movement brought a fresh faintness rolling over him. He willed himself to let go the guard rail, to make an effort to bring her back if it cost him his life. But his fingers wouldn't surrender the solid touch of metal.

"Dawn," he pleaded, "I beg you. Come back. Your mother and I will give you anything you want."

"My mother is dead, and you can give me nothing." She stood in thought for a moment, the breath of the fog wafting through the sheen of yellow hair. "I have what I want, daddy. I have this feeling. You know? This real fine high. I'll never let it go. Nothing can hurt me. I'm immortal, daddy!" Her voice rose to a note of delirium, of frantic joy. "I'll walk on the face of the fog, into the friendly darkness—"

She took a step, forward off the end of the stone finger. Eyes jutting, mouth gaping wide for a scream that wouldn't come, Wexler had the incredible notion that she was really doing it. Walking on thin air into the gossamer fog.

Then like an unreal swirl of ectoplasm she was gone, falling into the cottony depths. The darkness folded about her quickly, but in his mind's eye Wexler envisioned the plunge. Down, down she went, faster

and faster, until her life was shattered at the rocky base of the cliff five hundred feet below.

And Wexler's long, keening scream ripped out of him at last.

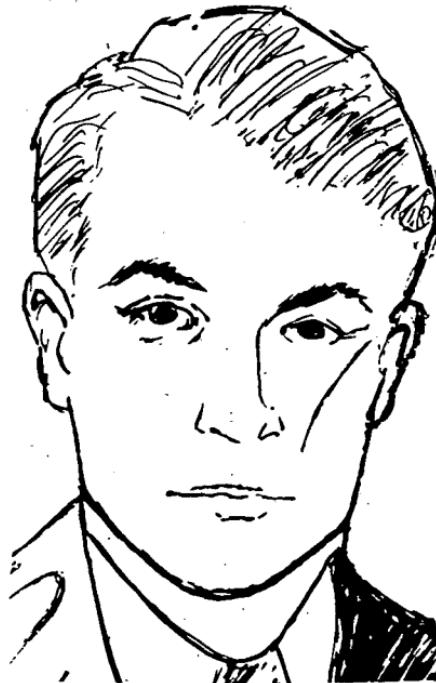
Time became a bray blur, swirling about him like the angry fog. He knew somehow that he was moving back to his car, avoiding the sight of the pert, bright-orange Ferrari.

He had the feeling of disembodiment, of standing aside and watching his suffering self. Only one thing was clear, the thought of Ronny Kirk. Ronny was the one who'd introduced his Dawn, his little girl, to drugs. Ronny had killed her just as surely as if he'd pushed her off that spiny ledge of stone...

Wexler felt his car keys in his fingers, heard their jangle. But he didn't open the car door first. Instead, he went to the rear of the car, inserted the key, let the trunk lid swing up.

The trunk light flicked on, revealing spare tire and jack components in their bracket. He bent, reached, and twisted the large wing nut, loosening the bracket. The jack stand and base rattled as the bracket pressure released.

Wexler snaked out the jack handle and slammed the trunk shut. He stood, gripping the



metal handle in his right hand, trying it against his left palm with two soft blows. He nodded in grim satisfaction.

Moving to the side of the car, he opened the door and slipped under the steering wheel. He laid the jack handle crossways on his lap, started the engine, turned the car around, and drove quickly away in the direction from which he'd come.

The fog lifted a little while Wexler dropped from the heights. Struggling beams from a mellow California moon glinted on sand and rasping

surf when he braked the sedan in front of Ronny Kirk's beach cottage.

Killing engine and headlights, Wexler studied the place. It was a cheap, nondescript; clapboard shanty set on stilts, with a narrow screened-in porch enclosing the front and lights inside making bright cracks in the window blinds.

Abode of a part-time student, surfer, beach bum, guru, Wexler thought.

He eased from the car, holding the jack handle firmly. His breathing was even. The trembling had left his body. His mind felt clear and cold.

To this point, he reflected, he'd led an ineffectual, bumbling life. Inherited money. Married. Given a lot of gay parties. Gone the meaningless rounds with shallow, gay people. Killed his wife uselessly in a grinding accident. Cowardly watched his daughter plunge to death.

But at last he had a purpose. It burned through his blood and brain, suffused his entire being.

Calmly, he mounted the wooden stairway to the screened porch, flipped the door open, and crossed to the door of the front room.

From inside came the rau-  
cous, subdued thrumming of  
hard rock music. Wexler lis-  
tened briefly to the stereo tape.  
Then with the jack handle

shielded against the right leg of his slacks, he lifted his left hand and knocked.

The door swung open, flooding the porch with light and framing Ronny Kirk. In ragtag shorts and thong sandals, he was a tall, rangy youth, darkly tanned, with a cleanly chiseled face beneath a tousle of sun-bleached hair.

Wexler saw the spark of shock as Ronny looked at the gray haggardness of his face.

"Well, hi, Mr. Wexler," the youth said uncertainly.

"Hello, Ronny," Wexler croaked. "Do you have company?"

"No, but I—I was just going out."

"I'll only take a minute. There's something I must say to you. No need to invite me inside. Just step out and close the door."

Ronny was hesitant, cautious. Then his shoulders moved in a shrug. He moved onto the porch and let the door swing shut.

In the dimness of light filtering from inside, Wexler studied the nicely-modeled young head, deciding where he would strike the first blow.

Ronny lifted a hand and pushed wisps of his pale tan tousle from his forehead. "What is it, Mr. Wexler? You sick or something?"

"Dawn is dead," Wexler said surprisingly calmly.

He watched the color leave Ronny's face, the skin jerk tight, the mouth fall slightly open.

"You killed her, Ronny."

"Me? Now wait a minute, Mr. Wexler! I've been here in the cottage all evening!"

"There are many ways of destroying a person, Ronny. You pointed her toward the cliff where she fell tonight. You gave her the first joint to smoke."

Ronny backed a step, staring hypnotically at Wexler's face. "I don't know what's happened exactly, but you're making a mistake. I explained about the pot. So did Dawn."

"When I came to the jail and bailed you both out."

"It was a one-time thing, Mr. Wexler! An experiment. Dawn didn't like it. Neither did I. It was just a piece of rotten luck that the fuzz hit the place where we were that night and we got busted for a one-time experiment."

"She's waiting for you, Ronny," Wexler said implacably.

The youth broke loose from the spell of Wexler's face. He threw himself backward, fumbling for the knob of the front door.

"Mr. Wexler, you blown your

mind or something? You can't really blame me—"

The jack handle flashed from its shielding shadows. It rose, fell. Ronny threw up his arms to protect his head and ducked to one side. The metal bar smashed his wrist aside and glanced from his scalp.

Ronny stumbled, fell to one knee. "My God, Mr. Wexler—" he cried out hoarsely. Stunned, blinded, he made pawing motions of defense with his hands.

The jack handle seemed to have a will of its own in Wexler's hands. He was gripping it now with both, pounding and pummelling. He saw Ronny lurch and fall, saw the bloody brightness where the sun-bleached hair and skin burst away. Ronny was a mute, tormented, broken crab, scrabbling senselessly about on the porch floor.

Wexler felt tireless, lifting the jack handle, smashing it down. Ronny's thrashings misdirected many of the blows. Wexler struck him on the shoulders, arms, back. But always he aimed at the head and bit by bit the head became a gory caricature of a human head and Ronny at last lay sprawled in silence, stillness, immune to the final blow that cracked the skull.

Wexler lifted his arms a final time, standing in a crouch over

Ronny. He lowered the jack handle slowly, backing away by inches from the prone form. A shiver went through him. He tore his eyes from the sight of what he'd done, rushing suddenly through the screen door and down the uncertain wooden steps.

He stumbled and fell against the car, shaking feverishly. He stared at the jack handle, his hands, his bare forearms, his sport shirt, seeing the splatters of Ronny's blood. His stomach heaved. Groping, he worked his way along the side of the car until he found the front door handle.

"Home," he husked through chattering teeth. "I've got to get home."

He seemed next to breathe again when he closed his own front door and fell back against it. His eyes flicked about the softly-lighted entry foyer. A breath of gratitude slipped through his lips. The foyer was empty. Neither of the two servants had heard him come in. He must get upstairs before he was seen. Strip off the bloody clothing. Destroy it.

The jack handle—where was the jack handle? He stopped at the foot of the thickly-carpeted, spiraling stairway, trying to remember. In the car. Yes, he had carried away the jack handle, dropped it in the car.

Change clothes, then go bury the jack handle.

The beautiful, hand-rubbed walnut stair railing was reassuring under his hand. Up he went, silently, into a hallway where mahogany paneling and vases of fresh flowers from the gardens in back reflected the comfort and taste of the rest of the house.

He was mid-way along the hall, dredging up strength to make it to the master bedroom, when a bedroom door on his right opened.

Dawn stepped out, shorts and sloppy sweatshirt, hinting girlish figure, nice oval face, yellow hair streaming down her back.

Wexler stopped, spread-legged, everything about him going loose, shoulders caving, hands dangling, mouth hanging, eyes protruding in pools of hot sweat.

"Dawn? No. Can't be. You're dead... I saw you there... Saw you fall..."

She was coming toward him, white with shock, sudden wild tears filling her eyes. "Oh, daddy, daddy!"

Her touch was real, her hands gripping his shoulders fiercely, supporting him.

"Dawn," he gasped. "You're here!"

"Of course, daddy."

"It wasn't really you out

there on the finger of stone, falling into nowhere."

"Please, daddy," her voice edged with hysteria. "Let me help you into the bedroom. You must lie down."

Instead, he lifted a hand and touched her cheek. "You're here, really here. You're safe."

Then he crumpled against her, staggering her as she tried to break his fall. She managed to ease his limp body to the carpet.

She stared at his inert form, lifting a hand to her mouth and biting her knuckles hard. With a small note of old despair breaking in her throat, she forced herself to move, running to the telephone extension at the end of the hallway.

She dialed a number quickly, and while the phone a few blocks away rang, she turned her head slowly, her eyes

drawn toward her father. She held back the sobs and kept an outward semblance of control, tearing her gaze away when Dr. Hornaday's reassuring voice came across the wire to her.

She sagged, putting her hand on the telephone table to brace herself.

"It's Dawn, Dr. Hornaday. Please come quickly... Yes, it's daddy. He's tripped again—No, I don't know on what. Mescaline, amphetamine, LSD perhaps. Something very strong. He's spaced all the way out, and I'm afraid this is his worst trip yet. There's no way of knowing where he's been, what he's imagined, the things that he's done. There's blood, Dr. Hornaday." Her voice stifled. The sobs came. "Blood on his hands and clothes. Blood all over my daddy—"

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### To Subscribers And Readers Of MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE

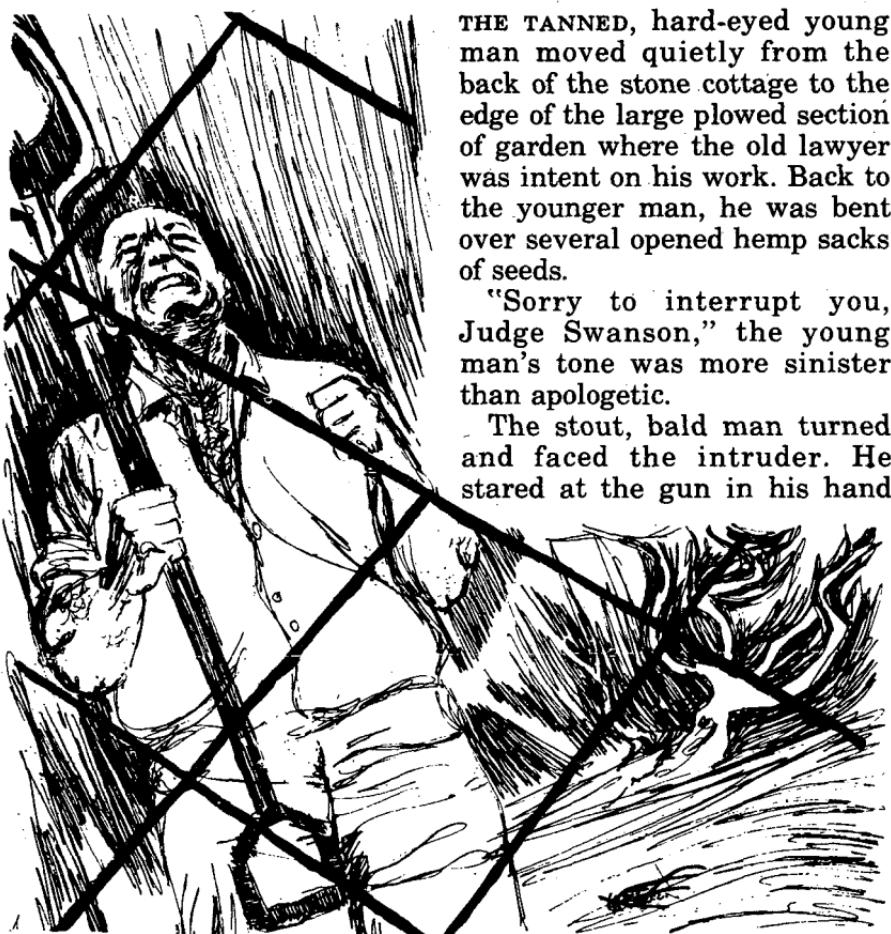
*In the July, 1975, issue of Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine, the editors were confronted by a mystery which, from the mail we have received, understandably baffled our observant readers as well. The locale of this puzzle was the latter portion of Joseph Payne Brennan's excellent THE APPLE ORCHARD MURDER CASE, which resulted in considerable reader confusion.*

*It began with the first proofs of the issue, when a page of the original manuscript was printed out of order. We caught and corrected this error—but what happened thereafter mystifies us as greatly as it has mystified our readers. MIKE SHAYNE hopes you'll accept our profound apologies.*

# DEATH IN THE GARDEN

*It was months after the judge's murder, and his killer was in the clear. But the victim had sowed the seeds of retribution before he died.*

by DAN ROSS



THE TANNED, hard-eyed young man moved quietly from the back of the stone cottage to the edge of the large plowed section of garden where the old lawyer was intent on his work. Back to the younger man, he was bent over several opened hemp sacks of seeds.

"Sorry to interrupt you, Judge Swanson," the young man's tone was more sinister than apologetic.

The stout, bald man turned and faced the intruder. He stared at the gun in his hand

with an expression of disbelief. "What does this mean, Lee?" he demanded.

Lee came a step closer with the gun pointed directly at the judge's heart.

"It means," he said, "that you made a bad guess when you thought you could get rid of me. I'm going to marry Julia in spite of you and your lies about me."

The older man's face reddened. "I did not lie about you, Lee. I merely tried to protect my ward against you. I know that you came close to a prison term for your stock swindling, that you're heavily in debt at present, and without prospects. No question that you should find it convenient to impress Julia with your charm and ask her to marry you. But she never will while I live. You can make book on that."

"That," explained the dapper young man in the brown tweed sports coat, "is why you are going to die, and at once. I've been careful to pick a time when Julia is in town. This place is nicely isolated, and I've taken the precaution to use a silencer. It should be quite safe: murder by person or persons unknown."

The old man stared at him. "You have it all neatly planned, Mr. Lee."

There was a silence. Then

Lee asked: "Any last request, Judge?"

From a leafy branch of one of the ancient trees came the bright cry of a bird, a cheery note typical of this calm peaceful spot with its fringe of tall shade trees. The pale blue eyes of the Judge studied the younger man.

"You really mean to do this insane thing?" he said quietly.

"I do," Lee was firm. "And I don't propose to waste any more time about it."

The bald man raised a protesting hand and then, as it dropped limply to his side, he pleaded: "Give me just a moment. Just time to look around my garden before I leave it." He glanced at the bags of seeds at his feet and then he looked at Lee: "Let me scatter out a few last handfuls of seed."

"Hurry up about it!" The man in the brown tweed was disdainful. A sneer crossed his ugly good looks as he watched the old man bend down and pick up a handful of seed and then totter aimlessly about the center of the plowed area, his stout figure wandering in seeming panic, a blank expression on the round, lined face. The Judge was obviously in his dotage, and completely at his mercy.

But there was no question of mercy as Lee casually pressed

his finger on the gun's trigger. There was no sound as the old man suddenly clutched his side and toppled over by the bags of seeds.

Lee didn't even go over to make sure of his job. He knew that the Judge was dead. He was a crack shot, and at that distance there could be no question. He left as quietly as he had come..

A few months later he called on Julia at her town house. The attractive blonde girl's pretty face was marred by a troubled look as she let him in.

"Oh, Roger, I'm glad you're here early," she said.

He bent down and kissed her, and with his arm still around her they went on into the living room. "I have no patience for your problems," he joked. "If you'd married me at once, as I suggested, I'd be looking after all of them now."

Her pleasant, oval face flashed an expression of reproach. "You know I couldn't dream of getting married so soon after the Judge's—after the terrible thing that happened."

Lee patted her hand and said with understanding: "You're sensitive and very lovely, Julia. I suppose I must try to understand."

"I haven't known what to do with the cottage," she said. "My

solicitor has been questioning me about it. The grounds are getting in bad shape. The garden has gone to ruin."

Lee nodded. "Yes, and that was the Judge's particular interest."

Julia nodded solemnly. "I'll never forget it, Roger! How they found him there! Who could have done such a horrible thing?"

He sighed. "It's hard to say. I suppose, as a Judge, your uncle must have made many enemies."

"In a country court? Surely no one who would hate him enough to murder him," Julia shook her head.

"You'd think the police would have turned something up by now," Lee suggested.

"They've had nothing much to go on. The crime was so pointless. There was no logical motive for it." Julia sighed. "That isn't what I intended to discuss. I wanted to ask you if you would mind driving me down to see the place this afternoon."

Lee felt a sudden uneasiness. He had been careful to avoid the village since the afternoon he had committed the murder. There had been no reason for anyone to notice this. But if he refused to go down with Julia now, she might wonder. And her wondering could conceivably set up a chain of cir-

cumstances that would direct a shadow of suspicion in his direction. And he was eager to avoid even the taintest shadow.

So he said: "I'll go if you like, my dear, although I don't think it's good for you visiting the place."

"Never mind," she smiled. "We can discuss plans for the wedding on the way.

Lee smiled in return. "That almost makes the trip sound inviting."

When they arrived at the solicitor's office in an ancient red brick building on the main street of the village, they found an interested party waiting for them. He was a tall, thick-set man in a gray suit, with the polite, official air of a senior police officer.

He rose with a smile. "I am Inspector Evans of the County Police. And I'm sure it's very good of you to make the trip down here, miss." He turned to eye Lee. "And you too, sir."

Julia glanced at Lee shyly and then told the Inspector. "This is my husband-to-be, Roger Lee."

The Inspector extended his hand. "Glad to know you, Mr. Lee. You're very lucky, lucky indeed, sir."

Lee cleared his throat. "What is this business about the cottage? We're in rather a hurry to get back to town. My fiancée

understood her solicitor wanted to discuss selling the property."

Inspector Evans nodded sagely. "That is so. Mr. Robertson, the solicitor, was called away a few minutes ago. And so he left me here to meet you people. And he suggested I take you out to see the place meanwhile."

Lee's tone was cold: "Is that really necessary, Inspector?"

"He seemed to think so," the Inspector said apologetically. "It's running down fast out there. Too bad, and the Judge took such a pride in it, especially in his garden! Did you know the old Judge, Mr. Lee?"

"We met once or twice," Lee said guardedly. "I'm afraid I didn't make much of an impression."

The Inspector laughed. "Oh, come now. Mustn't be modest. I'm sure you did. The Judge was a sharp judge of men. He'd notice." And with that the Inspector winked jovially at a blushing Julia.

As they drove out to the cottage, the Inspector kept up a running patter of talk about the countryside. Finally they were at the picturesque old stone place with its vine-covered walls.

The Inspector unlocked the door and led them into the living room, which showed signs of dust and neglect.

"Rather than take you out to the garden," the Inspector suggested, "we'll look at it from the window. There's a wonderful view of it from the back of the second floor. Have you been up there, Mr. Lee?"

He shook his head. "No," he said, shortly.

"You must see it, then," the Inspector said as he led them up the stairway. "Of course, the garden has been neglected, and it's no showplace such as it was when the old Judge was alive, but you'll still find it interesting."

Julia took Lee's arm as she followed the Inspector up the stairs. "Something must be done. I don't want to see it left alone and neglected this way," she said.

"Best thing is to instruct your solicitor to sell at once," Lee advised. He felt nervous and uneasy. He was a murderer who had no desire to return to the scene of his crime. He didn't even want a view of it from a second-story window. But it was too late to avoid that unpleasant prospect now.

The big Inspector stood by the window, the curtain held aside in his hand. He stared down toward the garden: "Yes, that's all that's left of the Judge's work now. But, as I said, you may find it interesting."

Lee stepped forward with Julia by his side and, glancing down at the garden, he was suddenly transfixed by what he saw.

From Julia came a faintly whispered: "I don't understand."

Lee stared on without turning to her. In large letters of vivid purple were the letters L-E-E outlined against the dull weeds, outlined in a scraggly pattern of brilliantly hued purple flowers.

The Inspector's voice came hard in his ears: "I think you were wrong about the impression you made on the Judge, Mr. Lee. It must have been very vivid indeed for him to leave this record of your name with the last flowers he managed to plant while his murderer stood by and waited.

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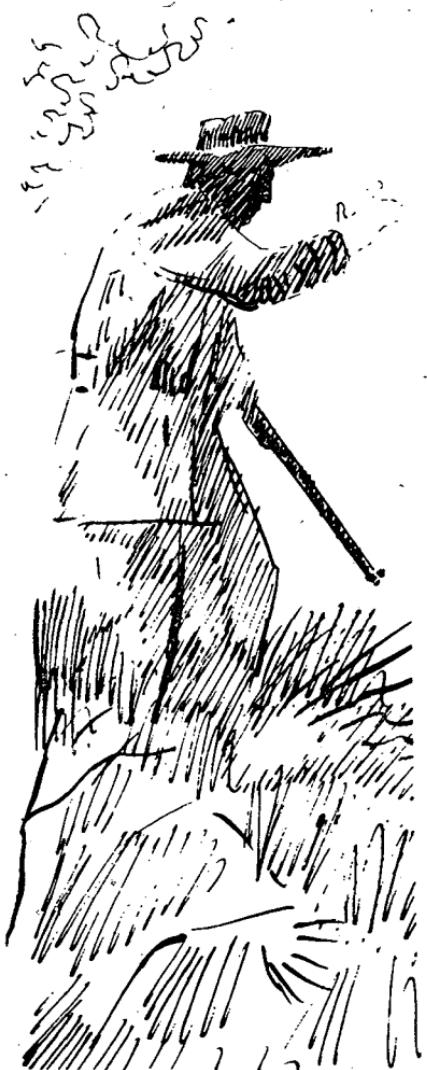
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*Lester King got away with murder a long time—so when vengeance finally caught up with him it was doubly sweet for the one he had wronged.*

# Retaliation

by

MARY  
LINDA  
BOGGIA



THE HIGH MEADOW was surrounded by a forest of ponderosa pines. Their pleasant, resinous odor and the hot sun on my back lulled me into carelessness until I heard the clop of horses' hooves on hard-packed earth and sat up, instantly alert. From our protected position behind the blown-down pine, my pony and I could observe the two riders without being seen.

I was an Indian, scouting the high meadow for sign of elk. The white men were my enemies, until I recognized Uncle Will as the lead rider, followed by Mr. King. Forgetting my game, I started to jump to my feet, then saw Mr. King suddenly spur his big stallion against Uncle Will's pinto, making him rear and throw Uncle Will into a pile of rocks.

Quickly King snatched a sack from his saddle horn, untied its

mouth and dumped its contents, three large rattlesnakes, on Uncle Will's prostrate body. After spooking Uncle Will's pinto, he casually rode across the meadow without glancing back.

I tried to tell Aunt Martha what had happened, but she was too distraught to believe what a traumatized child, who had watched his parents burn to death in an apartment fire, had to say. Besides, Mr. King was the wealthiest, most influential man in that part of the state and it was unthinkable that he'd resort to violence. She told me to hush my mouth about Mr. King. Uncle Will's death was an accident, like the sheriff said, and that was that.

Aunt Martha sold the ranch to King a few weeks after Uncle Will's funeral, then collapsed. I spent the next nine years in an orphanage, remembering how King wanted my uncle's ranch so he could explore for oil. Uncle Will wouldn't sell. He knew there wasn't any oil, he'd never be that lucky.

The ranch was all he had in the world and, poor or not, he aimed to cling to it because he loved the high country and his freedom. When he told King what he could do with his money, King rode off in a rage. A week later Uncle Will had his "accident."

A good many years went by—tough, hard-scrabbling years—before, once again, I was able to walk across the high meadow. This time, I moved slowly, searching with my Geiger counter, with a mule shuffling along behind me.

Above, a golden eagle drifted lazily on the air currents against an azure sky. There was deception in his laziness, for in an instant he could streak down and pick off a careless jack-rabbit or a foolish quail. I had learned valuable lessons by observing the wildlife on Uncle Will's ranch when I was a child.

Pausing, I put down the Geiger counter, wiped my brow and took a drink from my canteen, letting the lukewarm water trickle down my throat while I scanned the shadows cast by the pines. There it was—movement and a flash of metal glittering in the noonday sun. I was being followed today, just as I had been for the past four weeks. Fear sneaked up on me and I shivered in spite of the hot sun.

Capping the canteen, I picked up the counter and led the mule toward a stand of brush in the center of the meadow. Willows and aspens covered an area half the size of a football field around the source of a small stream which flowed

through the meadow. It was also the feeding ground for a huge old grizzly bear. I'd seen his sign for several days and knew he came from the peaks above to devour the kinnikinnick berries which were hanging thick and ripe from the bushes, then to drink in the stream.

The mule suddenly shied, so I tied him to the nearest aspen and proceeded alone to the edge of the pit I'd dug over the past several nights. At my appearance, the grizzly roared and reared, glaring up at me with angry eyes. He was a powerful bear, mean as a mountain winter and raging with fury at being trapped.

Carefully, I placed the prepared saplings over the pit and covered them with weeds and grass. After camouflaging the pit, I got the mule, watered him and walked out of the brush, following a pattern I'd established over the past weeks. As we moved toward the upper portion of the meadow, I caught a flicker of movement at the edge of the pines.

*Excellent! Let him follow me even if it means a bullet in the back. When the right moment comes, I'd give him the slip and sneak away down one of the narrow trails into the canyon below.*

The mule and I arrived at

Jake Post's general store by three o'clock. I hurried into the store, which was tended by Jake and his hound. Jake asked his standard question and this time I gave him the answer he'd been waiting for, whispered in confiding tones.

"I've found it—enough uranium to make the Geiger counter go crazy. Mr. Lester King is going to regret selling my late uncle's spread back to me for a few thousand dollars, especially after taking a loss on what he paid Aunt Martha."

I laughed to myself. Uncle Will's high country ranch hadn't produced the oil King was convinced it hoarded, nor did it furnish enough grazing land for his pure-bred beef cattle, so eventually he tried to unload it. After Jake wrote me about it, I'd had my attorney purchase the property for me.

When King first saw me in Jake's store five weeks earlier, he looked as if he'd seen the devil. Then Jake let it slip that I owned Uncle Will's ranch and was looking for uranium. King's beefy face turned red and he stalked out of the store, an evil gleam in his eyes.

After telling Jake about my find, I added that I'd be heading back up to the high country to stake out the extent of the field and get several samples to be assayed. I bought some

canned goods, packed them in my saddlebags and left for the mountains again, riding the mule. At the edge of town I reined in and glanced back. King's bay stallion was tied to the porch railing in front of Jake's store.

I urged the mule to a trot, knowing we'd soon be followed. By the time we reached the high meadow, dusk was closing over the mountains. I dismounted at the edge of the brush and tied the mule to a willow on a long line, then slipped into a clump of aspens. Taking my geologist's hammer from my belt, I began chipping away at a stone. While I hammered, I glanced back at the meadow, half-expecting to feel a bullet rip through my chest.

Soon a horse and rider emerged from the pines and jogged toward the mule. King dismounted with a grunt, tied his horse close to the mule, took his rifle from the saddle and came down the trail toward me.

King saw me and brought the rifle to his shoulder. With age, he'd lost some of his speed, and I bolted down the twisting elk trail, keeping temptingly out of his sights. When I reached the edge of the pit I jumped, hit the

ground on the far side and rolled into the willows.

King came on the run, puffing and blowing like a winded horse. I twisted myself into a crouching position in time to watch him disappear into the ground with a curse that was soon drowned by the snarling grizzly. I backed deeper into the willows and waited. Soon there was silence, then out of the pit came the bear, aided in his escape by the saplings. He charged past me, heading for the mountain peaks, away from men.

Slowly I walked to the edge of the pit, took out my flashlight and shined the beam on what had been Mr. Lester King. After sending King's horse galloping down the mountain, I got the mule, dragged King's body from the pit, placed it on a tarp and carried it to the far side of the bushes.

It took all night to bury the saplings and tarp in the bottom of the bear pit, but by morning all traces of the trap were erased. After washing my hands and face in the stream, I picked up the shovel, mounted the mule and rode off across the meadow toward the rising sun without glancing back.

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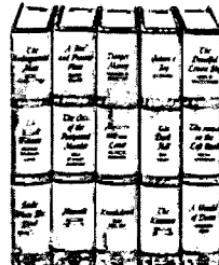
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